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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEMORABLE MESSAGES AND IDENTITY
CONSTRUCTION

By

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Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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in Communication Studies

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ABSTRACT

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Communication Studies

The Relationship Between Memorable Messages and Identity Construction

Chairperson: Dr. Betsy Wackernagel Bach

A qualitative analysis is reported here, in which 22 international students were interviewed about their overall experiences studying abroad, as well as memorable messages received and the context in which those were communicated. Scholars like Larson and Gill (2017) and Alvesson (2010) have focused on the role communication plays in constructing identity. With that in mind, Knapp et al.'s (1981) concept of memorable messages informs how specific messages influence individuals' sense of who they are. This study expands knowledge on the relationship between memorable messages and international students' identity construction, focusing on the impact of messages exchanged before and during their study abroad experience.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 – Literature Review	4
Identity	4
Identity work.....	5
Narrating identity.....	6
Identity regulation.....	7
Discourse and identity.	9
Memorable Messages	10
Structure and form.	14
Circumstances surrounding the enactment and reception of the message.....	14
Nature of the content of the message.....	16
Nature of the relationship between the recipient and the source of the message.	17
Responses to memorable messages.	18
The Pain and the Gain of Studying Abroad	19
Research Questions	22
Chapter 2 – Methods	24
Gaining Access.....	24
Researcher Lens	25
Gathering data	25
Participants	27
Data Analysis	28
Chapter 3 – Results	31

Studying Abroad in Context.....	31
Reasons for studying abroad.....	31
Uncovering the new culture.....	36
The challenges.	40
The Impact of Studying Abroad.....	43
Confidence.....	44
Independence.	44
Self and other awareness.	45
Memorable Messages.....	47
“You can’t do everything.”.....	47
“Take your chances.”.....	48
“You can learn from me.”.....	49
“You’re doing okay.”.....	50
Identity and Memorable Messages.....	51
New selves.....	51
Setting new standards of self.....	52
Motivated selves.....	53
Motivated positiveness.....	54
Chapter 4 – Discussion	56
Identifying Education Abroad as Identity Work Setting.....	56
Communicating Memorable Messages	58
Memorable Messages and Identity Work.....	60
Memorable Messages and Identity Regulation	62

Implications	63
Theoretical implications.	64
Methodological observations.....	67
Practical applications.	69
Limitations of findings.	70
Directions for future research.	70
Summary	71
References.....	72
Appendix A – IRB Exempt Approval.....	80
Appendix B – Informed Consent Form	82
Appendix C – Interview Guide	84
Appendix D – Questionnaire	85
Appendix E – Recruitment Statement.....	86
Appendix F – Codebook Sample	87

Introduction

Concepts like globalization and cosmopolitanism have sparked researchers' interest on how individuals become who they are, how they understand themselves, and how they act as a consequence (Giddens, 1991). Even if individuals are not consciously engaged in crafting their identities, these questions have an impact on how relationships develop and organizations are enacted (Fiol, 2002).

In communication studies, personal identity has been investigated through a discursive lens (Larson & Gill, 2017). In other words, scholars are interested in the role communication plays in identity construction. Discourses provide resources for individuals to craft their identity narratives (Alvesson, 2010; Ashcraft, 2007; Kuhn, 2006). Scholars like Parker (2004) and Down and Reveley (2009) have investigated how large discourses such as gender roles or leadership constrain or enable identities. Large discourses, or Discourses, contain idealized societal rules for both who individuals should be and how they should communicate, based on certain components of identity like gender, religion, or even organizational role or position. For instance, Ashcraft (2013) illustrates the perceptions of the job of an airplane pilot as masculine emerge from communicating it as such, since the job of a pilot has little to do with gender features. By communicating this job as masculine, narrators exclude women from this occupational identity. In contrast, smaller discourses refer to specific messages that reproduce such larger discourses, such as "one must be a daring superman to risk flying" (p. 22). This message supports the larger discourses that define gender roles.

Gaps exist in identity research as scholars have not applied a theoretical framework to identify what type of smaller discourses serve to regulate and construct identity. Although researchers have relied on participants accounts' of messages they receive, discussions have

focused on how underlying rules for constructing identity are reinforced or challenged (Parker, 2004; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). For example, Parker (2004) analyzes how constructs like gender roles or race play out in individuals' identity construction in the workplace. Specific messages that individuals receive may have an impact not only because they reproduce larger discourses, but also because they can be enacted when individuals feel the need to hear such messages.

The process of consciously thinking about identity occurs in situations when individuals are somewhat vulnerable. Memorable messages are a theoretical framework that is beneficial for understanding this process because messages are usually enacted in difficult or uncertain situations, like starting in a new job, and are also known to have an impact in individuals' lives when they are figuring out who they are or how to act (Stohl, 1986). For instance, Knapp, Stohl and Reardon (1981) note that messages such as "Always remember who you are" (p. 39), even if enacted in a job context, can be recalled by recipients in other situations in which they need words of encouragement. When one's sense of self is challenged, then, thinking about memorable messages as means for narrating identity can be fruitful for understanding how individuals construct their identities.

Inspired by Stohl's (1986) setting in that recipients of memorable messages are generally experiencing newcomer socialization, the current study is focused on international students' experience abroad. International students face many challenges when entering a new country, including, but not limited to, learning a language and interacting with other cultures (Georgiou & Savvidou, 2014; Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Sheridan, 2011). In American universities, international students are able to find support in messages sent by individuals like academic advisors or even friends, who assist with the transition into a new country and academic culture.

The purpose of this study is to explore how and if memorable messages communicated to international students help international them make sense of their identities. To begin with, a literature review is provided to help clarify the concepts of identity construction and memorable messages, as well as the context of facilitating international students' experience. Next, research questions are posed and methods for answering such questions are proposed. Finally, the findings are reported and discussed.

Chapter 1 – Literature Review

Constructing identity is not an easy process. Understanding one's self depends on many factors such as interactions, roles, bodies, and of course, discourses (Acker, 1990; Down & Reveley, 2009; Lair & Wieland, 2012; Watson, 2009). Simply put, discourses are purposefully organized texts that can exert influence on individuals. Memorable messages have historically been enacted in moments when individuals need advice. Furthermore, memorable messages have a long-lasting impact on individuals, which means such messages can affect how recipients understand themselves. In this section, an overview of the literature on both identity and memorable messages is provided; research that details the study abroad experience is also highlighted.

Identity

Identity is defined by Kuhn (2006) as “the conception of the self reflexively and discursively *understood* by the *self*” (p. 1340, emphasis added). Scholars use this definition to ask questions that emerge from such definition. For instance, in communication studies, researchers are concerned with both what constitutes the self, and the communicative processes enacted to understand the self. Building from that definition, Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) think of identity as a continuous process that occurs when individuals are trying to answer the question “who am I?” and, consequently, “how should I act?” Because identity construction is not only concerned with the question of who individuals are but also with the question of how they should act, the ways in which individuals perceive themselves and their roles in relation to other people (e.g., mother and son, teacher and student) affect how they communicate and therefore how interactions and relationships are enacted.

Examining the communicative processes in the construction of individual identity, then, is the initial step for understanding more complex concepts like the communicative constitution of organizations, which explains how organizations are constructed through communication (Iverson, McPhee, & Spaulding, 2017). As such, the communicative processes involved in identity construction are discussed in this paper, the first of which being the concept of identity work. A broad definition of identity work, for clarity purposes, is drawn from Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) research on managerial identities: identity work is the process of making sense of one's self. This is followed by the process of narrating identities, as well as the process of identity regulation. Next, the tensions and the role of discourse in these processes are identified.

Identity work. Identity work is one of the communicative processes involved in identity construction. Alvesson and colleagues (Alvesson et al., 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) coined the term when investigating identity construction through a communication lens. In sum, identity work happens when people engage in "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). In other words, identity work is the communicative process through which individuals establish a coherent understanding of the self. Active identity work, or consciously trying to understand oneself, is ignited in moments of crisis or when an understanding of self is challenged (Alvesson et al., 2008). For instance, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) note that individuals actively seek to find explanations for their choices when they go through drastic career changes, such as starting to farm after leaving a banking career. Careers are closely tied to one's identity, given that jobs not only take a lot of time in people's lives, but also influence and are influenced by other components of someone's identity such as class (Adib

& Guerrier, 2003). Since leaving a successful career would be considered a bold move by most people, finding the reasons for engaging in such a big change invokes identity work. Similarly, when going through organizational changes, workers struggle to understand their new roles within organizations like organizational or career change (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) suggest that identities are not stable because they are situated in unstable contexts. Such instability can be understood as a reason for identity work to be enacted.

Narrating identity. Because identity work emerges from the need for establishing coherence for identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), constructing narratives is an approach to identity work that helps attribute meanings for identity (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). Narrating identity helps individuals feel authentic and make sense of themselves as they progress in life. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) explain how individuals look for explanation within themselves, as well as their contexts, to justify how they act and establish a rationale. In contrast, Wieland (2010) criticizes the assumption that individuals can accurately understand themselves by engaging in identity work because that can hinder the more complex aspects of identity construction, such as the ways in which individuals act differently depending on the roles they perform. This critique sheds light on the complexity of identity construction, which can involve other communicative processes in addition to narratives.

Highlighting how complex narrating identity can be, however, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) outline three characteristics of the process of narrating one's self. First, self-narration involves coherence. In other words, how well a narrative flows to an employer in a job interview, for example, determines how well accepted it is by that employer. When seeking coherence, then, individuals try to find coherent explanations for their actions and their sense of self. For

example, an international student participating in Bardhan and Zhang's (2017) study illustrates the relationship between how individuals understand themselves and how they act: "I have become so aware of my black identity that I cannot even dissociate it from who I am whenever I communicate with people" (p. 294). Second, narratives should be legitimate. Individuals craft their narratives using cultural resources and fitting them into social norms (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). For instance, Li (2015) reports how a student repositions herself in relation to others when studying abroad. The student says, "I came here to study, so I can't demand the teacher to treat me the same way as my Spanish teachers did" (p. 248). Third, the audience has some participation in how the narrative is constructed. Koehne (2006) notes that international students, for example, rely on university personnel to assist them in dealing with emotional or psychological issues.

Interactions influence how people evaluate their narratives and provide more resources for identity work. Building on Alvesson et al.'s (2008) claim about when identity work happens, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) also identify the characteristics of the context where narration happens. They argue that the consequences of the narrating one's self in one way or another and the relationship between author and audience are important contextual factors that influence the construction of narratives. For instance, Lair and Wieland (2012) notice how the context affects college students' responses to the question "What are you going to do with your major?" (p. 443). A participant in that study refuses to respond to the question if the person who asks is nothing but an acquaintance, therefore not even bothering to engage in the process of narrating identity. With all these inherent characteristics, narrating self is far from being a simple process.

Identity regulation. Understanding and narrating one's self depends on contextual factors, such as one's role in a family or other organization. Individuals find themselves

embedded not only in organizations, but also in discourses and relationships that shape their sense of self (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Such influence of the context on individuals sparks the process of identity regulation, which according to Alvesson and Willmott (2002) “encompasses the more or less intentional effects of social practices upon processes of identity construction and reconstruction” (p. 625). In other words, identity regulation is understood as the ways in which identities can be controlled. By this means, individuals may not have complete freedom in choosing who they are or how they act. For instance, the organizational discourses in Wieland’s (2010) study, in the form of implicit organizational values, encouraged employees to enact a productive self at work while also encouraging the notion that the same employees should be concerned with their well-being both at work and at home. Although in this case it may seem like individuals have two choices because there are conflicting discourses, due to time constraints employees actually fall into a double bind in which there is no way of achieving the self idealized by the organization. Employees may choose to focus on productivity at the expense of their well-being at home or vice-versa, but neither choice reflects the ideal self that the organization preaches.

Even though identity regulation can shape one’s understanding of self, individuals have agency in the sense that they can ascribe to assumptions about ideal selves or try to resist such assumptions by seeking alternative discourses (Alvesson et al., 2008). However, when discourses are less directed at individuals, such as organizational policies as opposed to direct messages, constructions for ideal selves are not obvious and therefore harder to resist (Wieland, 2010). When individuals are unaware of the discourses surrounding them, they do not find something to resist. For this reason, bringing discourse to the forefront of studying identity is crucial.

Discourse and identity. Discourse is one of the primary ways in which identities are regulated. Unlike narratives, which are crafted by individuals trying to understand themselves, discourses are underlying rules or values, as well as explicit messages, that influence such narratives. Here, discourse is understood broadly as text that has influence in communication behaviors. Kuhn (2006) and Alvesson et al. (2008) claim that individuals use “discursive resources” to help them craft their identity. Kuhn (2006) defines discursive resources as “concepts, expressions, or other linguistic devices that, when deployed in talk, present explanations for past and/or future activity that guide interactants’ interpretation of experience while molding individual and collective action” (p. 1341). In other words, messages can be the source of inspiration for one’s identity narrative. This claim is an important one because it determines how identities can be communicatively constituted. Narratives are situated and constrained by the availability of discursive resources (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). Language is the means through which, for example, advertising companies establish organizational identities that can eventually lead to consumer identification (Larson & Gill, 2017).

In addition, situated discourses such as organizational policies also help reproduce long-standing ideals or values. Tracy and Trethewey (2005) posit that discourses serve to “‘fix’ identities in particular ways that favor some interests over others and thus constrain alternative truths and subject positions” (p. 184). For example, the message sent by many self-help books advising readers to find their true, authentic self reproduces and reinforces a larger discourse that claims such a version of one’s self is real (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Likewise, Ainsworth and Hardy (2004) note that language reflects power relations, and report that “women’s language” is characterized as less influential. Therefore, both researchers and individuals interested in identity must be critical about discourse, due to its constraining and enabling power on identity.

Discourse is also the means through which one can investigate such seemingly internal processes such as identity construction. For example, Bardhan and Zhang (2017) infer how individuals can experience mixed feelings of being diminished and pride from participants' narratives. Referring back to the definition of identity in the beginning of this section, discourse is likely the only way researchers can investigate individuals' understandings of themselves. Scholars rely on individuals' accounts of the discourses received to understand how the process of identity construction develops (Down & Reveley, 2009; Kuhn, 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Participants in identity research use discourse both to construct their identities and to explain the communicative processes that occur in such construction.

Given the relationship between discourse and identity construction, investigating how discourse functions as an enabling and/or constraining force for identity becomes imperative. Given what aforementioned scholars argue about identity work, identity regulation, and identity narratives, it is clear that discourse plays a central role in how identity is formed, repaired, maintained, strengthened or revised (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Following is a literature review explaining the concept of memorable messages providing a theoretical framework that helps researchers find messages that have a long-lasting impact on individuals' lives.

Memorable Messages

Memorable messages are a powerful tool for coping with difficult or uncertain situations. Given in the form of advice, they constitute discourse that can indicate a good path to follow or teach a valuable lesson, for example. They have become a topic of interest to communication scholars, who have researched such messages and the impact they have on people's lives. In this section, the literature on memorable messages is reviewed. First, foundational work on memorable messages is explicated. Second, reasons for previous scholarly interest in memorable

messages research are introduced, along with the implications of memorable messages. Results from previous research are synthesized, and finally, five categories to describe characteristics of memorable messages are provided.

Knapp, Stohl and Reardon (1981) were the first to research memorable messages and define them as ones that “may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives” (p. 27). Although Knapp et al. (1981) recognize that human memory is not completely reliable, they were not concerned about that when researching memorable messages, because it was the meanings attached to the messages that were relevant and made them memorable, as opposed to specific wording. In other words, what impacts recipients is the lesson taught in messages like “if you want to lead a long, full life, do everything in moderation” (p. 33), as opposed to the form or the message, or the way the words are arranged. Later, Stohl (1986) emphasized that it is the individual’s retrospective judgment that makes a message memorable. Because her interviews were conducted using a retrospective method, she shows that messages reported by participants are memorable ones indeed, since participants recall messages enacted earlier in their lives.

The relevance of memorable messages in people’s lives compels researchers to explore their significance in a variety of settings and relationships. In their foundational work, Knapp et al. (1981) explain that messages are more likely to be remembered than events, and messages can benefit recipients who are in situations of uncertainty and struggle (Cornacchione et al., 2016; Knapp et al., 1981; Russell, Nazione, & Smith, 2012; Stohl, 1986; Wang, 2014). In addition, Stohl (1986) suggests that memorable messages are useful both for sense-making and as a behavioral guide, in the sense that individuals use memorable messages as references for how to behave in new situations. Nazione et al. (2011) point out how memorable messages like

“Try everything” or “College is the best years of your life” (p. 133) can be used as guides for how to behave and how to assess behavior, for example. Nazione et al. highlight how useful such messages are for overcoming challenges in difficult environments such as college, when individuals need guidance to deal with new experiences.

More recent research on memorable messages also yields interesting results, especially considering college students’ experiences. Nazione et al. (2011), for example, consider the challenges students face, the messages received regarding those challenges and the actions performed, and attitude changes that resulted from those messages. They note that students become more dedicated and developed a more positive perspective as a consequence of supportive memorable message such as “It’s not how you start, it’s how you finish” or “. . . don’t stress over grades” (p. 133). Also researching college students, Wang (2012) argues that even though largely positive, memorable messages can also be conflicting. For a specific group of students (i.e., first generation college students), on-campus mentors enact conflicting memorable messages that reproduce opposing discourses on how a college student should behave. For example, students receive messages that encourage the conflicting behaviors of both self-reliance (i.e., “Stay involved and always know what’s offered on campus,” p. 343) and seeking help (i.e., “Your family’s a big support to your education,” p. 348), as well as focusing on college (i.e., “College is . . . a bridge to your future so you want to build a strong bridge,” p. 343) and focusing on family (i.e., “Look out for the best for your mom because it’s hardest on your mom when you leave,” p. 348). Such differing messages create tensions for recipients, which may not be such a positive impact. The additional findings in Wang’s (2012) study highlight the importance of considering the circumstances in which memorable messages are given, as Knapp

et al. (1981) and Stohl (1986) suggest. The messages sent to first generation college students, for example, have different implications than the messages sent to other college students.

Memorable messages play a role in one's ability to overcome challenges, as well as how they can function as a means of self-assessment and control. First, scholars have attended to challenges faced by participants and how memorable messages helped them overcome such challenges (Nazione et al., 2011; Russell et al., 2012; Stohl, 1986; Wang, 2012; 2014). Stohl (1986) focuses on socialization of new employees, and Nazione et al. (2011), Wang (2012; 2014) and Russell et al. (2012) emphasize the challenges faced by college students, such as deciding a major or needing money. Russell et al. indicate that memorable messages like "Explore the library" or "Get involved in research" (p. 114) provide insight about the college experience for incoming prospective students. Similarly, Stohl (1986) notes that memorable messages like "If you're not helping, you're hindering," (p. 243) help new employees understand and have a script for how to behave in a new organization. Second, researchers (Nazione et al., 2011; Smith & Ellis, 2001; Smith, Ellis, & Yoo, 2001) argue that memorable messages are a frame of reference for individuals to assess their own behaviors. These scholars argue that memorable messages are referents to an ideal state, meaning individuals use memorable messages such as "Be tough" (Smith & Ellis, 2001, p. 337) to understand what is desirable, assess their behaviors, and adapt their actions accordingly if necessary. Nazione et al. (2011) explain that getting into college is a stressful period and that students experience stress and desire for support. They note that although students use memorable messages as guides to pursue good behaviors, Nazione et al. suggest that both individuals working in colleges as well as family members are often unaware of the impact of the messages they direct to students.

Adapting from Knapp et al.'s (1981) work, Stohl (1986) lists four categories for examining memorable messages: "1) the structure and form of the message, 2) the circumstances surrounding the enactment and reception of the message, 3) the nature of the content of the message, and 4) the nature of the relationship between the recipient and source of the message" (p. 234). Although most of these categories have been present in one way or another in later studies, a fifth category has also been explored, which is the response to memorable messages received.

Structure and form. Scholars have studied how memorable messages are structured and in what form they appear. Knapp et al. (1981) found that memorable messages are brief, direct, oral statements, like "Lonely people make walls instead of bridges" (p. 32). Originally, these scholars also contend that memorable messages contain prescriptive rules in the form of "if-then" propositions or that condition could be inferred, for instance "The dealer at bridge always bids first" (p. 30). However, some scholars, Knapp et al. included, ultimately argue that in terms of memorable messages the meaning is more important than the wording (Holladay, 2002; Knapp et al., 1981; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012). Because of this claim, scholars have not paid as much attention to structure and form as much as meaning and nature of content, and the question of whether recipients recalled exact wording is not as important as what the memorable messages meant to them.

Circumstances surrounding the enactment and reception of the message. The context in which messages are enacted affects their memorability, and for that reason memorable messages tend to occur in certain circumstances. First off, memorable messages are usually enacted in situations of uncertainty or difficulty, such as starting college or working in a new organization (Nazione et al., 2011; Stohl, 1986; Wang, 2012; 2014). Not surprisingly, advice that

becomes a memorable message is more salient in adolescence and early adulthood, as well as in life crises (Knapp et al., 1981). In addition, memorable messages are perceived as benevolent (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Stohl, 1986) as they help recipients make sense of and resolve their problematic situations (Knapp et al., 1981). When individuals need help, like in the initial stages of socialization, messages like "When I first started the job, my boss advised me not to call in sick before major holidays" (Barge and Schlueter, 2004, p. 243) give employees a better sense of what goes on in organizations, and the sender of the message is perceived as having good intentions for saying those words. In terms of how they are communicated, memorable messages are received in informal private settings (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Cranmer & Myers, 2017; Holladay, 2002; Stohl, 1986), and in face-to-face interactions (Cranmer & Myers, 2017; Knapp et al., 1981). Memorable messages, then, not only rely on larger discourses but also circumstances like these. Dallimore (2003) explains how circumstances play out in memorable messages received by women faculty, who face challenges when socializing into an academic career. In a women's only faculty meeting, one of the memorable messages enacted, "Women will have to be careful about the things that they say" (p. 237), suggests that women faculty watch what they said to their male peers. Besides, messages received by women faculty in terms of balancing family and career, implying that they must choose between one or the other, were not the same as those received by their male counterparts, since men are not expected to be primary caregivers for their children and therefore have a different experience balancing career and family. Thus, scholars must consider all aspects that can affect communication of memorable messages, particularly in cases when individuals face challenges that are particular to their social identity.

Nature of the content of the message. Considering the circumstances listed above, scholars have identified several characteristics of the content of memorable messages. Helpful in hard times, memorable messages tend to be *personal* (Dorrance Hall, Ruth-McSwain, & Ferrara, 2016; Knapp et al., 1981; McCracken, 2016; Stohl, 1986; Wang, 2012) and *action-oriented* (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Holladay, 2002; Knapp et al., 1981; Stohl, 1986; Wang, 2014). For example, first-generation college students receive messages such as “Whatever life throws at you, your family will always be there” from their parents (Wang, 2014, p. 278) or “Don’t skip class because you will get behind” from on-campus mentors (Wang, 2012, p. 343). These messages are personal and action-oriented, respectively, in that the first one expresses support and the second gives advice on what to do in college.

Scholars have also noted that memorable messages are usually *positive, motivational* and/or *supportive* (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Cornacchione et al., 2016; Cranmer, Anzur, & Sollitto, 2016; Holladay, 2002; Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012; Steimel, 2013). One example is how supervising officers sent memorable messages to female offenders on parole or probation to help them avoid criminal behaviors and to encourage them to engage in good ones (Cornacchione et al., p. 68). Although they can be specific for the context in which they are enacted, the content of memorable messages can also be applied to many situations (Holladay, 2002; Kassing & Pappas, 2007; Knapp et al., 1981; Kranstuber et al., 2012; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012; Stohl, 1986). Lucas and Buzzanell (2012) share the example of parents teaching their children about work ethic through memorable messages such as “Do it for yourself” (p. 201) during the 1980’s recession. Through messages like this, parents taught their children to pursue self-sufficiency, a lesson that can be applied to other contexts beyond economic hardship. Aside

from helping these families go through financial troubles, those memorable messages stuck with those children as they managed their lives in adulthood.

Memorable message senders also engage in meaning-making. Memorable messages have been used as referents for good behavior and ideal states (McCracken, 2016; Nazione et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2001; Smith & Ellis, 2001). Such messages have the potential of regulating identities. When researching memorable messages about motherhood, Heisler and Ellis (2008) uncovered several messages that supposedly define what good mothers are, such as “Good mothers listen to their kids and dialogue with them” and “Good moms stay home with their kids” (p. 453). In this case, as well as other messages that prescribe good behaviors, memorable messages are means of exerting control over others’ behaviors and decisions. Here, it is important to note that memorable messages are situated within larger discourses and have served to reinforce them in a way that motivates recipients of such messages to behave accordingly. Individuals receive and enact memorable messages such as “A mother needs to devote her entire life to her children” (Heisler and Ellis, 2008, p. 453) that are consistent with organizational values or societal rules. Memorable messages should be examined, therefore, with attention to the meanings they help produce and reproduce.

Nature of the relationship between the recipient and the source of the message.

Although they initially compared memorable messages to proverbs because of their structure, Knapp et al. (1981) highlight the fact that memorable messages, as opposed to proverbs, emphasize the relationship between sender and receiver. The relational context in which memorable messages are enacted affects their receptivity, meaning that the value recipients attribute to messages depend on how the relationship between sender and recipient is perceived. Since then, scholars have defended the importance of the relationship between individuals in

memorable message enactment. While some have described characteristics of senders like gender or status in comparison to recipients (Holladay, 2002; Nazione et al., 2011; Stohl, 1986), other researchers have focused on how the relationship affects the enactment of memorable messages or their receptivity. First, McCracken (2016) draws attention to the face-threatening aspect of sending memorable messages when one is concerned about the relationship. In her study, participants received memorable messages about weight, which is a sensitive topic and interferes with how messages are constructed. Individuals in romantic relationship, McCracken argues, might be more aware of the relational consequences of sending a message like “You really need to start working out again, babe, you’re being lazy” (p. 120). Second, memorable messages are only perceived as such when the relationship between sender and recipient is perceived as satisfactory. Kranstuber et al. (2012) argues that memorable messages are related to college student success, but not so much for their content as for their relational context. Students who have high relationship satisfaction with their parents, who sent memorable messages, are more likely to succeed in college. Similarly, Dorrance Hall et al. (2016) contend that whether memorable messages about weight are positive or negative do not predict adult behavior as parenting styles (i.e. critical, protector or professor) associated with the messages do. In other words, whether or not children will follow the advice given in a memorable message depends on how the affective aspect is communicated. Although it can be fruitful to assess status or gender of senders and receivers, these studies are good examples of how individual characteristics and their relationships can play out in the effectiveness of memorable messages.

Responses to memorable messages. According to researchers, memorable messages have practical implications as they are referents for sense-making and can change individuals’ attitudes and behaviors. As stated earlier, memorable messages have been used as referents for

self-assessment of behaviors (Smith et al., 2001; Smith & Ellis, 2001), as well as to define roles (Heisler & Ellis, 2008). Positive messages can change the valence of negative concepts (Holladay, 2002), and negative messages can be motivational as they consist of obstacles to be overcome (Knapp et al., 1981). For example, Holladay (2002) explains how recipients of memorable messages about aging did not think about getting old as such a negative thing when family members shared positive experiences through memorable messages like “Aging is . . . when you begin to enjoy life to its fullest” (p. 696). In a different context, Steimel (2013) posits that messages such as “We have to believe that we are making a difference” (p. 17), which express gratitude or highlight the significance of unpaid jobs, enhance volunteers’ identification with the organizations they work for. More drastically, memorable messages can influence behaviors (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Cornacchione et al., 2016; Heisler & Ellis, 2008; Holladay, 2002). Cornacchione et al. (2016) report how motivational memorable messages like “As long as [you] put [your] mind to it, [you] can do it” (p. 68) from supervising offices prevent female offenders from committing suicide and engaging in other behaviors deemed inappropriate for their recovery as rightful citizens. The significant impact that memorable messages have on their recipients further support the importance of memorable messages. The study abroad context can provide further insight to how memorable messages are enacted and impact individuals, given the challenge that is immersing into a new culture.

The Pain and the Gain of Studying Abroad

International programs have been an interest of higher education in the U.S. for a long time. Stakeholders like the private sector, educational institutions and government institutions have recognized the benefits a multicultural higher education can provide (Knight, 1997) both for sending American students abroad and hosting international students. In such exchanges,

Ross (2014) contends that a diverse education can lead to cognitive and democratic development due to the multiple perspectives available. To enjoy such benefits, institutions and international students must together create an environment that is favorable for establishing multicultural dialogue. In this section, an overview of the challenges international students face is offered, followed by a description of the role of advisors and host students in facilitating the experience of international students.

The challenges international students face range from difficulties with cultural differences in terms of language use, unfamiliarity with social customs, uncertainty about academic culture and others (Georgiou & Savvidou, 2014; Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Sheridan, 2011). For instance, Harrison and Peacock (2010) argue that language poses a barrier for communication when international students are not proficient. They add that even when international students are fluent in the local language, they face stereotyping from local students who assume international students cannot speak English. Beyond language barriers, many international students identify with academic cultures that value examinations instead of writing assignments and extra-curricular activities (Chang and Kanno, 2010; Sheridan, 2011). Switching to new assessment styles adds another layer of uncertainty to the experience abroad.

Offices for student success have acknowledged such difficulties and usually point students to resources such academic advisors, counselors, and writing tutors, as well as specialized services in the form of international student advisors. These university staff members provide support and assist with the transition from home to host country and into a new academic culture. Focusing on advising, Strayhorn (2015) claims that advisors should be understood as *cultural navigators* even for local students, considering college constitutes its own culture. He argues that cultural navigators are the people who have the knowledge to guide newcomers

within the new culture. Further, advisors as cultural navigators are aware of more relevant information that other people do not normally have access to or interest in. For example, they know how long it takes for most people to graduate and how much time it adds to change a major. This cultural perspective on advising suggests that the advisor holds the knowledge and power to socialize students into this new culture that is college. Although worthy of consideration, such a perspective also creates a notion of dependency, particularly for international students, in which the advisor's job is solely to assimilate students into the new culture as opposed to accommodating the differences.

In contrast to that notion of dependency, Xyst (2016) argues that students are not mere recipients and absorbents of knowledge, but that they engage with their environments and surrounding messages to construct their social reality. He states that "knowing emerges from an intentional process of creating connections between actions and consequences, between the student's behavior and the effect of it on and within the environment" (p. 16). Knowledge, then, involves theory and practice in the sense that it is developed from interaction and is applied in future interactions. When immersed in a new environment like a study abroad experience, for example, international students rely on close relationships to help them navigate their experience. Stebleton (2011) argues that the immediate environment, meaning people one interacts with on a daily or frequent basis, is the main source of support.

Based on their lived experiences, host students can help international students adjust to the new environment. Tran and Pham (2016) argue that international students seek to interact with students from the host country as a way to expand their cultural capital by learning about different culture norms and improving their language skills. A participant Chang and Kanno's (2010) study expressed how important that type of interaction is for academic purposes.

Especially when doing research, talking to peers is a good way to expand and exchange ideas for better outcomes. However, this learning process takes effort and requires interaction between groups. Because international students are the ones who chose to immerse in the new environment, they are also the ones who need to strategically choose how they act, often adopting host students' behaviors. Glenn and Johnson (2012) notice that most African-American students, like international students, need to adjust to the predominant culture to belong in the academic community. In other words, those who are minority groups in communities also find themselves needing to adapt to institutionalized social and academic practices if they want to succeed in that environment.

Although international students struggle to adjust to the local culture, they can benefit from learning about new cultures and places. With support both from advisors and host students, international students can thrive in their experience abroad and return home or stay in the new country with newly reconstructed worldviews that stem from intercultural interactions.

Research Questions

The challenges international students face have been well explored. Studying abroad involves immersion into new and uncertain environments, which makes cultural navigators like advisors and knowledgeable friends essential. Being in a new environment can provoke changes in how international students reflect on their identities. Memorable messages and identity construction as theoretical frameworks can contribute to the understanding of how such changes are promoted. The impact of memorable messages on recipients has been well documented, and Smith and Ellis's (Smith et al., 2011; Smith & Ellis, 2001) studies on assessment of behaviors indicate that memorable messages have the potential to change how recipients choose to act. If

memorable messages also have an impact on whom they choose to be, the relevance of memorable messages will be even further supported.

In other words, memorable messages can trigger processes like identity work and identity regulation. Looking at memorable messages can help examine how such processes occur in locally situated interpersonal interactions, as opposed to societal discourses and systems of control. As such, the purpose of this study is to explore how messages received by international students impact their identity construction when studying abroad. With that intention in mind, the following research questions are offered:

RQ1: What characterizes education abroad as a setting that triggers identity work, according to international students' experiences?

RQ2: In what form, circumstances, or contexts are memorable messages communicated to international students?

RQ3: What impact do memorable messages have in the development of international students' identities?

RQ4: How do memorable messages regulate identity?

Chapter 2 – Methods

Seeking to identify the context and impact of memorable messages on international student identities, this study is a qualitative thematic analysis. Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013) explain that qualitative thematic analyses focus on the identification, analysis and report of themes that appear within data. Tracy (2013) adds that understanding the self is one of the foci in qualitative research. Although she refers mostly to how researchers investigate their own selves, this notion is expanded to encompass explorations of how individuals in general understand themselves and their communication behavior. For this study, detailed first-hand accounts were used to understand the relationships between memorable messages and identity construction. In this section, the methods used for this study are described. To begin with, descriptions of access, the researcher lens, and the participants are provided. Next, the methods for gathering data are detailed. Finally, the process for analyzing data is outlined.

Gaining Access

As Tracy (2013) advises, researchers should try to immerse themselves in the setting where the communication phenomena are studied. To that end, I worked as an intern in an office for international student success for a semester prior to gathering data. One of my roles was to provide customer service at the front desk, which allowed me to network with students. In addition, students were recruited by direct email messages or phone calls. Such a direct form of contact was facilitated through a program that matches willing international students with parties interested in hearing about their culture and/or experience. An IRB proposal for this study was submitted and approved with minimal risk under the Exempt category, and is attached in Appendix A.

Researcher Lens

Here I provide a description of my role as a researcher to enhance external reliability, as LeCompte and Goetz (1982) suggest. As mentioned above, I was immersed in an international student office, an environment where international students visit often. Although data were not collected through observation there, my experience working in the international student office allowed me to have a more thorough understanding of the circumstances surrounding study abroad programs. I worked at the front desk providing customer service to international students and organized resources for international programs. My internship made me more aware of student visa requirements and the experience and struggles of undergraduate students, adding to my interpretative schemata. I learned, for instance, that students are not allowed to work off campus for money and they need to be enrolled in a certain amount of credits to maintain legal status in the U.S.

Moreover, I can be considered a full participant in the research, as I am an international student. Even though I did not collect observation data from my peers, being in the field for a prolonged period of time enhanced the credibility and rigor of this study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Tracy, 2013). Prior to research, I was immersed in the international student environment on the graduate level for a year.

Gathering data

Data for this study were gathered in interviews, as they provide detailed participant accounts on the phenomena being studied (Tracy, 2013), which are fruitful for understanding internal processes like one's understanding of self. More specifically, narrative semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore how individuals construct their identities and how memorable messages are involved in that process (see Appendix C). Semi-structured interviews

are comprised of set questions that stabilize the topic of the interviews yet allow for flexibility if follow up questions are needed (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Narrative interview is a type of interview that encourages participants to narrate stories related to the phenomenon studied (Baxter & Babbie, 2003; Tracy, 2013). The interview guide was designed to elicit narratives from international students, relating to their identity formation and memorable messages.

Interview questions were designed to understand the relationship between identity construction and memorable messages, particularly in the context of international student advising. To explore memorable messages, interviewees were first asked about messages from their experience abroad that had stuck with them. Once they reported those messages, participants were given Knapp et al.'s (1981) definition of memorable messages and asked if the messages they recalled fit that definition. Messages were then investigated in more detail by asking students to a) describe the context in which the messages were enacted, b) provide information about the impact of those messages, and c) explain how the messages changed how they see themselves. To explore identity, students were asked both how their experiences abroad and the memorable messages they heard impacted how they saw themselves. They were also asked to describe their journeys as international students and were encouraged to craft narratives that contained the highlights of their experience abroad. As Larson and Gill (2017) suggest, interviews work well for researchers interested in participant accounts on identity, rather than a pure, true representation of the communicative phenomena involved in it.

When conducting interviews, guidelines posed by Spradley (1979) were followed to create a friendly environment for researcher and participants according to the social and cultural norms from where the interviews were situated. He recommends, for example, that researchers use greetings, express ignorance and interest, and take turns during the interview process. One

interview was conducted in Portuguese to respond to a student's request. Interviews were conducted in different rooms on the campus where they studied, like meeting rooms and lounge areas. Interviewees filled out an informed consent form and a questionnaire to provide demographic information, which included gender, country of origin, age, time in the U.S. and level of study. Upon completion, they were asked questions from the interview guide, and any follow-up questions that the interviewer deemed necessary. Interviews were recorded on a computer and a smartphone was used as a backup device. Interview notes were taken during and after interviews to promote dependability in the data (Baxter & Babbie, 2003), and these interview notes were used to check saturation in the data gathering process. Once recurring patterns appeared in the interview notes, no more interviews were conducted.

Twenty-two interviews were conducted and lasted between thirty-two and sixty-nine minutes. They were transcribed manually for more familiarization with the data. Clean verbatim transcripts eliminated fillers such as "like" and "you know," as well as false starts. Transcripts comprised two hundred and one pages of single spaced, twelve-point font data. Participant accounts in the data provided a thick description of their experiences, which added what Baxter and Babbie (2003) call confirmability of the research.

Participants

A diverse group of students participated in this study. Baxter and Babbie (2003) posit that when researchers are seeking different perspectives on a phenomenon, they try to promote as much variation as possible between the participants, which promotes external validity in the research (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Cultural distance (i.e., how different cultures are to each other), gender, race and type of program (i.e. degree seeking versus non-degree seeking), for example, are factors that may have influenced how students perceived messages and how they

used them to construct their identity narratives. Having a diverse group of students allowed for a thorough understanding of how memorable messages are perceived and how they impact international students as a whole, and not a particular group of international students.

Twenty-two international students were interviewed. International students and former international students, both at undergraduate and graduate level, who have been studying abroad for at least one semester, were accepted as participants. This criterion for participation assured that students had a somewhat comprehensive understanding of the study abroad experience and its effects on their identity.

Participants' ages ranged from twenty to fifty-eight years old, with a mean of twenty-nine. They are from sixteen different countries, located in East, Central, Southeast Asia, Middle East, British Isles, Northern, Southern, and Western Europe, Eastern, Western, and Central Africa, and South America. One of the participants grew up in the U.S. and in another country, but self-identified as an international student. Fourteen participants are female, seven are male, and one did not specify a gender. Participants have been in the United States for an average of three years and two months, ranging from four months to ten years. These numbers may include times when they were only studying English at a university and times when they were not enrolled in a university. Eleven participants were graduate students and eleven were undergraduate students.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an interpretive standpoint. This paradigm of research stems from the basic assumption that reality is constructed through communication and social interaction (Tracy, 2013). This perspective is particularly fruitful for researching international students. Baxter and Babbie (2003) claim that "because people from different cultures or social

groups are embedded in different systems of meaning, the researcher must attempt to understand the particular systems of meaning of those whose actions are being understood” (p. 59). Students were asked about their narratives and used discursive resources to try to explain and interpret their social realities.

Data for this study were in the form of interview transcripts and field notes. The themes in the answers to interview questions or in the notes were used as units of analysis. For this reason, units of analysis were as short as a sentence or as long as a paragraph. Once interviews were transcribed, all the data were read and reviewed several times. Each response to a question was summarized and typed into a spreadsheet, with each interview question as a column and the responses for each participant as the rows. Data were analyzed in an iterative process (Tracy, 2013). The spreadsheet was used as a codebook that from which open coding and axial coding emerged, and an extract of that spreadsheet is available in Appendix F. Corbin and Strauss (2015) describe open coding as the process of developing concepts that indicate the meaning of data, whereas axial coding is a secondary process that helps explain how those concepts are manifested (Baxter and Babbie, 2003). In this study, open codes were overall themes for answers that international students gave that related to the research questions, whereas axial codes comprised open codes broken down into more specific themes. After answers were thematized, a new coding session was conducted, using data from interview notes to double check the coding.

The iterative coding process was one of several steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Tracy, 2013). In addition, participants were invited to add to the analysis by confirming the results reported here represented their experiences abroad and that of their fellow international students. Their collaboration contributes

to the credibility of this study because they confirm observations made by a single researcher (Baxter & Babbie, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Tracy, 2013).

Chapter 3 – Results

The results presented below reflect the themes in the data that help answer the research questions posed in an earlier section. Here the context of studying abroad and its impacts on international students are discussed, as well as the context of memorable messages and their impact on identity.

Studying Abroad in Context

International student journeys begin before they travel abroad. First, the decision to study abroad is influenced by several *reasons* students consider when enrolling in an international program. Second, once they arrive in the new country, international students start a discovery process that entails learning what communication behaviors are enacted in the *new culture*. Third, one's experience as an international student also involves *challenges* that mostly stem from how different such communication behaviors can be. These three aspects of a study abroad experience are discussed below.

Reasons for studying abroad. University students decide to study abroad for many reasons. Whereas people who make short trips abroad may simply enjoy the idea of going somewhere new for fun and seize the experience, sojourn students may be more strategic about their trip. Participants listed a variety of goals they seek to attain from studying abroad. First, interviewees stated that they go abroad because the opportunity is available to them through scholarships or university partnerships. They were also influenced by places and/or encouraged by other people. In addition to those, reasons that involve their studies specifically include seeking to stand out in the job market, improving English language skills, and attractive programs and schools in the U.S. Finally, having a new experience was one of the reasons why they decided to study overseas.

For several of the interviewees, an easily accessible opportunity to study abroad was a main factor in their decision to study abroad. They had the chance to travel either because of a scholarship from their government or a connection with the host university. Annisa, Gabriela and Irene¹ had scholarships awarded to them from their countries, which made the study abroad experience more affordable. Laura, Ava, Bezina, and Mia talk about partnerships between their home universities and the university they are currently in. Bezina explains, “my university has a strong connection. . . we have had students from [here] who have been [there], . . . I’m the first one to come here as a student as part of that collaboration.” For Sara, the opportunity presented itself when a representative from the U.S. university visited her high school, whereas Gabriela had visited the country before and met a professor who worked in her current department. For these students, the favorable circumstances influenced their decision to study abroad.

Another reason for students to study in the U.S. is the place. International students in the Northwest area of the country talked about the nature surrounding the university area in the something they would like to experience. Also having the place in mind, Maja recalled her previous visits to the city, and she thought campus was beautiful. Mia and Mina also highlight the fact that studying in a lesser known city would give them the opportunity to get to know a unique side of the country, as opposed to a more touristic place they might visit later in life. In Mina’s words, “maybe I should go somewhere that I would never go just for the trip or as a short period. And then I searched for it, the website and this university shows up.” More broadly speaking, Annisa points out that she would like to experience the four seasons as a reason why she chose the U.S. to study, as opposed to other countries.

¹ All the participants’ names have been switched to pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Conversely, some students focused on reasons to leave their home country. For instance, Carolina states that she would have not been able to get her doctorate degree in her own country, and that she needed to be kind of isolated to succeed, less distracted. Also concerned about their studies, Laura and Lucas saw the study abroad program as a chance to do science somewhere else, since their country is not a good place for science. Lucas uses the difference in salary as evidence of that, stating that “[in the U.S.] we're paying [post docs] two or three times more . . . So you escalate more according to what you should be paid based on how much you have studied and how much your work entails.” For some students, both their home and the place they were going were important factors in their consideration to study abroad.

Like place, people in students’ lives also influence them, either through observation or direct encouragement. With a social aspect in mind, Carolina and Celine felt more comfortable with the idea of studying abroad because each had close people to help navigate the experience of studying abroad. Carolina explains, “the fact that my friends were [in the city] when I came, it was a very important thing for me to have some networking already.” It was different for Omar, who was influenced by his admiration for someone. He was inspired by his dad, who taught classes and published articles as a scholar. Similarly, Sara and Efe point out that people they knew had studied abroad as well, like parents and former professors. Jane’s circumstances were different in the sense that she was influenced by her husband to move abroad years before she enrolled in a university program. Although their social network can be a good incentive, international students also have goals that relate to their position in a globalized world.

Recognizing English as a *lingua franca*, students study abroad to improve their language skills. Laura had studied English previously in her own country but felt like she needed to improve her writing skills in the target language. Likewise, Saman felt he needed to study

English. He disclosed that he even had studied abroad before with the intent of learning English, but at experience did not go as expected. He says, “I got admitted, and I got my invitation letter, and I got my visa Even though I went there to study English, I was learning [this language] and [this other language] instead of English.” With clearer expectations, Irene and Kim had worked in the language field and felt they would be incomplete professionals without an experience abroad. In Irene’s words, “for me, from my personal perspective, it would be pathetic for me, if I never live in English-speaking country, and I’m teaching English.” Having a more informal relationship with the language than Irene, Maja and Mina simply like English and wanted to experience it in an English-speaking country. No matter the reason for learning the new language, improving English skills is one of the academic goals for international students.

The study abroad experience also stands out in the job market beyond English skills. With that in mind, Efe saw the study abroad opportunity as one that would be enriching in the sense that it would broaden his horizons. With a different mindset, Thomas explained that the experience abroad would make his resume stand out in his country, where research is competitive. In graduate school, Irene observed although teachers are great in her country, they do not document what they do. She explains, “because I’m not growing up in the country where we focus on making a product, mostly we are consuming product by reading, and then just doing it. So most of the literature that we have is oral literature.” In her country, Irene feels the lack of research prevents teachers from sharing their good practices. Instead, she feels that teachers in her country only read about what others are doing. For these students, seeing the world from different perspectives is a great benefit of studying abroad that also makes them more valuable for the job market.

Specifically with their studies in mind, the variety of programs at U.S. universities fit students' academic interests. For some students, their area of expertise was important in their placement. Thomas, for example, ended up in the U.S. after searching online for a department that does research that matched his specific field of study. Like him, Omar, Gabriela and Annisa went to a particular university only because it had programs that fit their area of expertise. Gabriela was coming back to school after many years. She stated that in her professional life "there are times when [she] feel[s] very stupid. So [she] thought it was time for [her] to stop to learn a little, study." With that willingness to learn and do research, Gabriela eventually enrolled in a doctorate program that would foster her understanding of what goes on in her work.

More broadly speaking, international students relate they just wanted to have a new cultural experience. That desire was sparked by previous exposure to American culture on some level, like Saman and Mina. Earlier in their lives, they could see how different life was in the U.S. by watching movies, and since then wanted to study abroad and have a first-hand experience. Ava had a similar sense of awe when her friends who had been abroad gave her testimonials like "it's amazing, you gotta try it, you're going to learn so much more than just staying at home." More experienced, some students had traveled abroad and longed to spend more time in a new place. From previous trips, Cara learned that "[it]'s kinda cool and then when you go home or when you move to the next place you take [the little things] with you, whether it's a favorite cuisine or a different greeting." Efe and Maja also mentioned previous travel as a factor that influenced their decision.

As Ibarra and Barculescu (2010) point out, individuals seek to establish coherence in their identity narratives. The goals and reasons international students list for studying abroad are

starting points for their identity construction. Their goals guide their identity narratives and actions as a central idea connects ideas in a text.

Uncovering the new culture. In the pursuit of the goals detailed above, students experience a heightened awareness of the new and their own cultures. From socializing both with other international students and American students, to differences in academic practices, students achieve much more than they had initially planned by learning from such differences and succeeding in their studies.

Socializing and networking is facilitated during the orientation for international students on a nonimmigrant visa. In that orientation, these incoming international students hear about visa documentation and other procedures. More importantly for students, Laura and Maja thought orientation was a good place for them to meet the international friends. Laura went downtown with other international students in her first week abroad to explore the city. There is a sense of comfort in discovering the new place together. Whereas studying abroad can be a big step out of one's comfort zone, international students build their safety net early in their study abroad program.

With that said, some students manage to make American friends and even be in romantic relationships, with whom they share remarkable experiences. With her American roommates, Mia traveled to several different towns in and even to Canada. In a more personal way, several students mentioned being invited by local families to their Thanksgiving dinners and Christmas celebrations. Sara illustrated how it feels to receive such invitations: "For the second year in a row, I went to her house, and it's a family event, she doesn't have to invite me . . . and I felt like she wouldn't leave me alone." In times like Thanksgiving break, international students have the reassurance that they have people who care about them.

When it comes to school, students identified cultural differences that fall under the umbrella of being in a new educational system. Undergraduate international students were surprised to find out they had an array of classes to choose from to get their major. Mina compares this system with that of her country: “I feel like the students really are focusing on more stuff that they're really want to do, compared to my university. . . . [In my country, t]he goal is to get a better job.” Similar to Mina’s perspective, several students brought up that in their countries the classes are set for each major. Not being used to such freedom makes international students more dependent on their advisors or individuals who have a thorough understanding of the educational system as a whole and major requirements.

On a smaller scale, there are also differences in teaching and learning expectations. Many students claim that studying/working hard is what is needed to succeed both in the U.S. and their home countries, but several students described how hard work is understood in different cultures. For most of their home countries, students only need to work hard toward exams. Interviewees used different words to describe this process. Thomas says it involves learning and spitting it out, Mia defines it as cramming, and Kim calls it memorization. In contrast to that way of studying, Jane feels that in the U.S. she needs to work continuously. In her words, “you have to make a schedule, it kind of reminds you what’s important to do first. If I have homework, I always finish in the same day. Except writing, that will take few days.” When engaging in coursework, international students go through a triple learning curve because taking a class involves processing the content, the language, and developing study strategies.

In order to succeed in their studies in the U.S., students also notice they need to participate in class in a way they are not used to. Kim noticed that in the U.S. a creative mind is more valued than in his country, and critical thinking and writing skills are expected of students.

In graduate school, according to Lucas, one needs to take initiative and be responsible for their own research. As undergraduate students taking classes, Sara and Mina have observed that speaking out in class helps you thrive as a student in the U.S. As Mia puts it, “I think that's another thing about international students, . . . it's not within them to speak up, because back home you wouldn't do it. So you kind of have to break the mold really quickly. And after that, it's grand.”

The differences in how students communicate with professors is also noteworthy. For instance, Efe states that professors are seen as “demigods” in his country, meaning they are far above students in the educational hierarchy. The same happens in Omar’s country where the sense of authority is more recognized, and professors have “the absolute word.” On the flip side, international students notice how much closer they are to their professors. Efe and Mia enjoy the informality with professors, and Celine enjoys that faculty have office hours. Omar notes that in the U.S. one can even engage in disagreements with your professors. In other countries, there is also a hierarchical relationship between freshmen and seniors in college, which does not exist in the U.S. Mina, Irene, and Jane pointed that out as another cultural difference, as seniors can be almost as important for newcomers as professors. Kim explains:

“So basically with the professors, if you have a good relationship, that's definitely... Kind of promises you a good grade. . . . So I got a grade from a professor, by maintaining the relationship. And I get good tips on studying for a certain subject by my seniors. So obviously, that's like number one thing that you can do throughout your college life.”

This process of discovering how things work in college can be taxing, but it also leads to positive outcomes. Having learned how to navigate the cultural difference while balancing her life with three kids, Jane is proud to say she has a grade point average of 4.0. The same sense of

pride was present in the narratives of both Omar and Kim, who have received degrees and point out that graduating is a highlight of their journeys. For Efe, a highlight was participating in a conference where he met several authors from articles he had read. Students took professional opportunities available on campus and in the local community. Carolina and Maja did internships on campus, whereas Saman worked at the campus cafeteria. This work experience was extremely beneficial to Saman, who thinks “working and then hanging out with native speakers is one way to learn language way faster was great to improve his English.” Immersing into a new culture gives international students positive and enriching experiences.

The change in environment gives international students a new perspective of their own culture and origins. When asked to tell their story, several students highlighted that they understood others in a more profound way that they had before studying abroad. Mina, for instance, learned more about diversity in a social justice class she took. Referring to cultural differences and how one can make sense of them, Lucas explains:

I think that people tend to operate based on what is normal to them, and normal is defined by whatever they experience the most. And then there's less normal situations that they also experience, with given frequency, so this is actually pretty statistical. But suddenly, I feel like, when you leave your environment, where you have grown up, then you're suddenly exposed with much more frequency to a series of events that never have occurred to you before, so they qualify as not normal, but then they happen more often, because it's what's normal here, right? And suddenly what your understanding of normality is basically widens up.

With a similar perspective, Thomas thinks that being forced to interact with others on a regular basis and then developing close relationships has helped him understand why his American

friends behave in the way they do. Being in a different environment, Irene also changed her perspective on discrimination. Being a Muslim, she would hear about discrimination in countries like Australia and the U.S. Spending time in the U.S. and reflecting back, she realized how she was privileged in her country and was not aware how minority groups were discriminated there too.

The cultural differences described above challenge international students' understanding of themselves and their environment. As Alvesson et al. (2008) note, identity "is shaped by larger cultural and historical formations, which supply much of our identity vocabularies, norms, pressures and solutions, yet which do so in indirect and subtle ways" (p. 11). Encountering new vocabularies, norms, pressures and solutions in a new country triggers identity work for international students.

The challenges. Although the cultural differences can lead to more self and other awareness as a positive aspect of the experience abroad, they also pose challenges. Obstacles that stem from the cultural differences described above include confusion in course selection, not sharing the same cultural background as American classmates, and being understood and understanding scientific language, as well as feeling that they do not belong to the local community.

Maja faced difficult times because she was not familiar with the university system. She was wrongfully placed in a class, which led to her failure in that class. She explained her tough situation:

They have student advisors that put me in a class that nobody ever takes until their sophomore year. And you're supposed to have taken [100-level Math] or higher as a prereq. . . . And I never even had anything other than English class in English. And that

was a disaster. Could not figure out, and then they wouldn't let me drop the class, so I had to actually go, I had to fail it.

Not having set classes for their major can be confusing and troublesome for international students, and the administrative part of the institution is also not designed to accommodate international students. Even their names can be an issue. Having multiple last names, Carolina is registered under different names at the university system, at the bank and at the social security office. When she got a job on campus, all those names needed to be matched so she could get paid. On the other hand, Omar, who is an American citizen, is often given the wrong paperwork because he looks like a foreign student.

Other cultural aspects that are not related to the university system also cause issues to international students. Celine says not sharing the same cultural background as her classmates and friends can be annoying, like when her friends use quotations from movies she has not seen. Although it is not usually a big problem for her, not sharing a history can affect her studies when professors rely on that in their teaching. Celine explained how she needed to work harder because she was an international student. In her words, “it wasn't the same for my classmates, because they knew what happened back then, they could easily relate. But for me, it's like, I have to make some extra, I have to read extra on what happened back then.” As a teacher, Cara needed to be more careful when communicating because her students were “extreme” Christians, something she had not been exposed to. Bezina also had to learn to be more careful, regulating her body so she would not hug as a greeting. Whilst these cultural nuances can certainly be frustrating, dealing with language constitutes an obstacle that seems to be harder to overcome.

Although English is learned and spoken all over the world, international students do not hold the same privilege native speakers do. With that said, even international students who are

native English speakers acknowledge that it can be hard to make themselves understood at times when they are studying abroad. Aside from some phrases that have different connotations, Ava points out, “I guess sometimes people don't understand me. When I get too excited, my accent just gets too strong.” The struggle is accentuated when international students are not native English speakers. The language barrier hinders their success in school. Gabriela, for instance, was afraid of participating actively in class. She could understand the professor and wanted to speak but could not understand the classmates as well. Gabriela was afraid of “saying something out of context that someone has already said.” International students who speak English as an additional language fluently are not exempt of language barriers. For them, the scientific jargon adds a layer of difficulty. Jane estimates that out of the total school work she does at home, thirty percent of her time is dedicated to deciphering language. Omar adds that because international students need to work harder than American students, they are more stressed.

Finally, international students are aware and/or made aware they are outsiders. Several students do not appreciate it when people they meet make their nationality or culture the center of the conversation, as if the nation component of their identity is the only one that sparks interest. Efe describes what happens when he meets someone new:

[The fact that you're an international student is] the first thing people notice about you.

The first thing they'll tell you, they'll ask you, ‘where are you from, where are you originally from?’ No matter how much I'm trying to fit in. So the option is to either embrace it and see it as innocent curiosity or, you know, get pissed every day.

Other students have had the same experience. Jane says people know she is not local by looking at her face, whereas what gives Sara and Lucas away is their accent. Related to that or not, several students have found it hard to make American friends. In his country, Olivier used to

study in groups for hours after class, but in the U.S. he feels each student lives their own life unrelated to other students. Being nontraditional students in more than one way, Jane and Gabriela think their age might also play out in their difficulty in establishing relationships with local students. Although several students struggle with the social aspect of their experience abroad, the responsibility is placed on them to make the extra effort. According to Bezina, “[international students] are here to adjust to the existing cultural environment, it's not the other way around.” Whether international students adjust to the new norms or not, studying abroad has an impact on how they see themselves.

The goals for studying abroad, the process of discovering cultural differences, and the challenges are aspects of a study abroad experience that provoke changes in international students' identities. As Koehne (2006) explains, the new environment drives international students to “[construct] new storylines about themselves as students” (p. 252). Newcomers like international students feel the need to revise certain definitions they held to be true, such as “a good student is one who gets good grades in the end.” Such revision provokes shifts in international students' identities.

The Impact of Studying Abroad

The experiences of international students trigger communicative processes related to identity. When asked how the general experience changed how they see themselves, were able to compare who they are now with whom they were prior to studying in the U.S. Their answers were related both to their experience at school and their immersion in a new culture. Themes emerged for how differently students see themselves as an impact of the study abroad experience. Identity shifts involve more confidence, more independence, changes in how they work and how aware they are of themselves and others.

Confidence. First, international students acknowledge that their experiences abroad make them more confident to engage in new experiences and reach out to people to socialize.

According to Laura, the fact that she can reach out and meet new people in a second language means that she can do that in her own language as well. Ava was motivated by the fact that “it was either stop being shy or be alone.” With that said, international students’ developed confidence goes beyond their social skills. The change in environment allowed Mia to look back and realize how little her problems back home were:

You can literally have a blank slate coming over here. Any problem you have before . . . can literally be put on hold until you get back. Because nobody knows who you are when you come here. . . . I actually had a really serious depression. And it was really bad to the point where I had to take medication for it. And when I was here in the summer, I didn't have to use it anymore, because I actually, I was grand, and I didn't have the stresses of work, because it was brought on from stresses and stuff. . . . Because all the stresses that I had before, and everything I worried about, I was able to talk it out with someone who actually knew nothing about me.

With this statement, Mia suggests that even though her problems back home were still the same, looking at them from “the outside” allowed her to construct new meanings for those problems.

Independence. Changing the environment also gives students a sense that they need to be more independent. Not having close friends and family around makes students feel more self-reliant. Several students had never paid rent and other bills prior to their study abroad experience. Sara, for instance, was impressed she was able to get a car on her own. She remembers thinking, “oh my gosh, I got a car just by myself.” Having spent more time in the U.S., students like Celine and Cara feel that their growing up was an additional factor in the

change in how they see themselves. “Now I have to work and be responsible financially, emotionally, be responsible in so many ways that I wasn't before,” says Celine. Celine identifies with a collectivistic culture, which means group identity is more valued than individual identity (Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998). For her, having few or no family members and close friends around is a big change, and forces her to be independent.

Self and other awareness. Another way in which international students change their identity is by understanding their own and other's cultural biases. For some students, understanding others results in a more positive attitude about interactions that feel unusual to them. When comparing her personality with the way another culture acts, Laura recognizes: “I thought I was shy, but I think they are more shy. So you understand that each culture . . . has different things, and you're not going to communicate with them all the same, because everyone is different.” Thinking more of the societal level, Bezina used to have an idealistic image of developed countries, but now she is aware that American culture “is also a culture with its own limitations, with its strengths,” and in her country people “may be economically poor but [they] have the cultural background that everybody should be proud of.” Getting to know more about others and other ways of acting makes international students aware of who they are and who they want to be.

Presented with new possibilities for the self, international students adapt to or resist the host culture, in a process that can be conscious or unconscious. Earlier in life, Lucas suffered bullying and became defensive in interactions. Once more open to people, Lucas knew changing could be a good thing, and narrates this process of change that happened earlier in life:

I lost people that I really care about and I nearly lost the friends that I gained during that time, which were the first ones ever for me. And that made me realize, “well, man, your

values are so out of place, you need to change them." And so I remember the day that I decided that I would change myself, that I wanted to be somebody different, and that I decided that I would fake it until I would become that person. . . . Probably because of the time that I decided to do that, it led to a so much better outcome, that now I'm not afraid of losing my identity.

Having had good experiences with changing before his experience abroad made Lucas much more open to adapt to his environment. In contrast, Cara's changing process occurred more unobtrusively, and she is only aware she has changed when she is back immersed in a familiar culture. In her words,

every year there's a group of [people from my country] that come over, . . . people I never met before in my life. And I'll spend one evening in their company and feel more comfortable and relaxed than I can with a bunch of Americans that I've known for a long time. Because you're not even aware that you're on guard till you drop it.

Whereas Cara and Lucas are willing to adapt to their environment, some international students resist change. In his sojourn to the U.S., Thomas had the comfort of hanging out with other international students. According to him, in a short-term program "you end up with international students . . . that have the same like, 'what's happening?'" That allows international students to keep some distance from the host culture. In his long-term experience as a graduate student, he, like Cara and Lucas, states that he was forced to understand his American friends because he could not only interact with internationals anymore. Because he developed closer relationships with local students in his department, Thomas was more open minded and understood their behaviors better. Many of the impacts discussed here are triggered not solely by the change in environment, but also the messages received in this new environment.

The shifts in identity described above support the idea that identity involves communicative processes (Alvesson et al., 2008; Alvesson, 2010; Haugh, 2008; Kuhn, 2006). All the changes emerged from interactions international students had with other people or the environment. However, those changes are broad observations made by international students when they reflected about their experience abroad overall. In addition to this generalized perception how one's experience abroad promotes shifts in identity, messages received by international students impact their identities in a more specific way.

Memorable Messages

Memorable messages received by international students before and during their study abroad provide guidance throughout their time in the U.S. The memorable messages that students reported receiving expressed four main ideas, including a) communication about their limitations and b) encouragement to make the most of their experience abroad. International students also noted c) learning lessons through nonverbal message, as well as d) receiving reassurance. Examples of such memorable messages are provided here, along with a description of the context in which they were communicated.

“You can’t do everything.” Some students received memorable messages that helped them figure out what their limitations were. Two examples with distinct contexts illustrate this theme. First, Annisa took three science classes in the same semester, which gave her plenty of homework to do and got her very stressed. She ended up failing one of these classes, which turned out to be one of the classes required for her major. When she sought her advisor for guidance, he told her that class was only offered once a year. Then, Annisa received a memorable message in the vein of “not all people in this major graduate in four years.”

The circumstances surrounding one of the memorable messages received by Lucas were much more positive in contrast. Lucas was doing very well in research, with data to support his hypothesis that a theory that had been widely accepted in his field was not a good explanation for the phenomena he studied. The advisor's message, summarized as "be humble," constrained the way Lucas communicates by conveying how important it was to respect the work that had been done by other researchers before their project.

Although the memorable messages in this theme are not necessarily positive, they are definitely motivational and perceived as benevolent as scholars note (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Cornacchione et al., 2016; Cranmer et al., 2016; Holladay, 2002; Kranstuber et al., 2012; Steimel, 2013). Knowing what they cannot do motivates students to look for alternative ways to succeed. As indicated by Smith and colleagues (Smith & Ellis, 2001; Smith et al., 2001), memorable messages constitute guidelines for what are considered good behaviors and states. Once aware of their limitations as international students, participants figure out whom they can be and how they can act.

"Take your chances." Meanwhile, other students received messages that encouraged them to take opportunities available to them. These messages were received by students when they felt uncertainty before going abroad or did not know how to make the most of their experience abroad. For example, Kim was in a training period for an internship abroad. During a meeting, a former U.S. ambassador told his group to "stay out of [their] comfort zone." The sender complemented the message by reiterating that foreigners do face challenges, and Kim recalls her saying "but you guys are young, so you know, without that challenge, you will never get anything." Although the training referred to a professional experience abroad, the lesson Kim

learned from that message still applies to how he conducts his life as a graduate student in the U.S.

Like the memorable messages reported earlier, this message is motivational and perceived as benevolent. One important aspect of how this message was received is the circumstance in which the interaction took place. The memorable message was received in a training, characterizing the setting as formal and public, unlike the private, informal settings described by Stohl (1986), Barge and Schlueter (2004), and other scholars.

“You can learn from me.” International students also learn from memorable messages they received by observing how others act. Circumstances experienced by international students allow them to observe different communication behaviors and learn from such observations. For example, before coming to the U.S., Jane had taken three years of college in her country. When she met with student advisors to figure out what classes she needed to take, they informed her she could transfer many credits to her new major in the U.S. When she tried to figure out the process for transferring credits, the student advisor’s supervisor told her that transferring was not a possibility. Jane remembers her saying, “I don’t care who told you that, I’m the one in charge right now.” Jane did not think it was worth to put up a fight, so she took the classes again. Only a year later, when she ran into a professor from her country, she found out that yes, transferring credits was possible. She sought help from an advisor in a different office who acted a lot differently than the advisor in her department. Her new advisor was much more helpful, as Jane explains: “she really make a list for me, like which class I should take for this semester and next semester.” For Jane, the second advisor’s attitude was a memorable message that influenced her experience studying in the U.S.

Memorable messages like the one received by Jane differ from the ones reported in previous literature in the sense that they are mostly nonverbal messages. According to participants accounts, nonverbal messages can be memorable ones because they “may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives”, to reiterate Knapp et al. (1981, p. 27). For Jane specifically, the memorable message was still received in a moment of struggle, as Cornacchione and others (2016) point out, and like the memorable messages reporter earlier, this nonverbal message was motivational for Jane to continue using the advising resources provided by the university.

“You’re doing okay.” Also motivational, positive messages about their academic performance or even personality reinforced how well international students were doing in their journey abroad. For Mia, that message was communicated to her when went to her professor’s office. Mia was working on a project and was not sure she was doing what she was supposed to do for the assignment. In addition, she thought the other students around her were working harder than she. She sought her professor’s guidance, and received the memorable message “you’re pretty smart.”

Saman received similar reassurance, but in different circumstances. An advisor asked him if he wanted to participate in an event where he would talk about his culture to high school students. In response, he expressed that he did not feel confident enough in his language skills to do that. His advisor replied back, “if not you, I don’t know who else.” This message was a memorable one for Saman, giving him the confidence he needed to speak for the local community.

Similar to Mia and Saman, participants in Steimel’s (2013) study received memorable messages that praised their competence. Steimel adds that memorable messages like these have

an impact on individuals, who show increased organizational identification when they are volunteers in organizations. For the international students in this study, such memorable messages also had an impact on their individual identities.

Identity and Memorable Messages

Interviewees were asked how the memorable messages above changed how they saw themselves. The themes that emerged from the data express the different ways in which identity can be constructed both in terms of identity work, which implies individuals has agency in constructing their own identities (Larson & Gill, 2017), and identity regulation, which indicates the context has a major influence on individual identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The first two themes discussed next sparked shifts in identity in ways that reflected students' realizations about their identities, a process that is referred to as identity work, whereas the following two indicate that the environment and interactions shape international students' identities, which is referred to as identity regulation.

New selves. For many interviewees, hearing memorable messages provoked shifts on their understandings of whom they are. For these students, the memorable messages received made them realize that the way they previously viewed themselves had been somewhat inaccurate. For example, Efe discussed his advisor asking how he was doing every time he went to her office. It made him feel like she cared about him as a person, he felt like *someone*. Knowing that someone cares about him made him have a different perception of himself as someone who was important to others. On a different note, although Sara thought the experience abroad as a whole made her feel more independent, does not feel that she can be relied on for help. She notes, "I feel like I don't do enough for them. Because, I mean, they live here, so they have everything, but I'm always being taken care of." In a reflexive process during the interview,

Sara noted that the nonverbal memorable message of her friends “being there for her” helped her realize she was independent on some level, but not as much when she compared herself to her American friends who had further knowledge of the educational system and cultural nuances of the college experience.

Setting new standards of self. From a different perspective, some international students set new standard for themselves, based on their observations. New standards of self were crafted from observing the actions of others to determine goals for identities, as opposed to interpreting messages that changed how international students saw themselves. Whereas the messages described above helped students develop a clearer understanding of whom they are at that moment, the messages in this theme guided students in the direction of whom they should and/or wanted to be. For other students, what changed was the standard for self they sought for themselves. For instance, Lucas felt that there is no need to be a “cold machine” to be a professor. That was soothing because humanized the profession. Irene and John also lowered their standards by not seeking to be “the best.” Interpreting the memorable message she received, Celine found out that doing her best does not mean staying up late to get something done. She developed an awareness of what she needs to do:

I know that if don't get that sleep, I'm not gonna do well. . . . So just telling myself, like, “hey, listen, that was the best you could do, quit thinking about it, just let it go, do something else.”

Students also set new standards by experiencing good behaviors and attitudes. When it comes to learning by example, students noticed behaviors they would like to adopt, as well as behaviors they reject. Maja and Thomas received such good treatment from university staff who helped them navigate the university system that they set it as a standard for whom they want to

be. As stated earlier, an advisor refused to help Jane figure out how to transfer the credits from her previous college experience. When a second advisor treated her better and was proactive in solving her problems, Jane was reminded that she was not in her country anymore, meaning she did not have to put up with bad attitude. The new standard she set for herself was that she could fight for her rights as a student. Contrastively, Annisa realized that she had not studied hard enough to achieve her goal of graduating in four years, and she knew she should not fail another class. For her, she realized she needed to have higher standards for herself as a student if she wanted to graduate in four years. For all these students, their interpretations of the memorable messages led them to set new standards for whom they wanted or needed to be.

Motivated selves. The memorable messages that motivated new selves for students were perceived as direct prescriptions for whom they should be. Whereas the impacts of memorable messages described above resulted from international students' interpretation of the messages, this theme refers to changes in identity that entail international students closely following advice from others. Receiving compliments and being encouraged to do as much as they can while in the U.S. motivates students to keep on going and pushing themselves further.

When international students receive positive comments from their American peers, they often act upon such comments and reflected in a change of behavior or attitude. For example, after receiving positive memorable messages, Maja felt proud and motivated to do her work, while Celine became more intentional about being welcoming to other international students who visited her workplace on campus. Mia went through a similar identity work process when she felt she could just be herself. She describes her realization: "I thought I would have to put on a face for [Americans] just so I could be included, and then I realized they actually liked me for who I was rather than what I was." In contrast, Ava was encouraged to be different, but the

outcome for her was still positive. Having pushed herself to travel despite the cold, she sees herself as someone who is outgoing and enduring.

Motivated positiveness. Identity changes also refer to how positively international students feel about advice they receive. Like the messages in the previous theme, international students received direct guidance on how to act or whom to be, but messages reported here only become memorable when a positive perception of their identities, including their actions, is developed. Kim is more positive about things that happen around him, stating “there is no useless experience,” which ends up making him comfort zone bigger. With a similar positive outlook in mind, Saman was encouraged to repeat his memorable message to his peers: “we’re the Muslims in this community, and we’ve been targeted for many years. If not us, who else will do it? If not now, when will we do it?”

Thinking positively about memorable messages motivates international students to recall them. Looking back and reflecting on why she kept acting as the memorable message suggested, Cara realized:

Once you've done it, once you've acted on that and asked for help the first time, I suppose I would say that it very definitely becomes easier to do it again. . . . For me it was a positive experience because I got some help and I, like, moved on past that tough time.

So I would say because I got some positive feedback there, I'm more likely to do it again.

Cara’s explanation on how the message was so influential suggests that the outcomes of following advice are important. While international students can act based on what other people tell them, what motivates them to keep on doing so is positive reinforcement.

On that note, students also experienced positive changes in their mindsets when memorable messages helped position them more accurately in relation to their environment.

Being taught how Americans think got Mina to be more patient when interacting with Americans, and Gabriela's awareness of her limitations allowed her to "be gentler with herself and take more risks." Also changing how she looked at her failure to get a scholarship, Irene saw herself as one of many students who may be working just as hard as her. Overall, students describe the impact of memorable messages as a positive one.

Overall, memorable messages impact how international students narrate and understand their identities in different ways, like Alvesson (2010) suggests. In addition to widening international students' perspectives of who they were prior to the experience abroad, memorable messages also show students different possibilities for who they can be. In more direct ways, memorable messages were prescriptions for how students should behave, similar to what Cornacchione et al. (2016) report. Such memorable messages resulted in changes in how they act, and well as how positively they look at such actions.

Chapter 4 – Discussion

The results discussed above help explain the impact of memorable messages and the study abroad setting on identity. In this section, the four research questions are discussed, as well as the theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

Identifying Education Abroad as Identity Work Setting

The journey to study abroad in the United States starts well before students travel to another country. The decision to study abroad is one that involves many factors. Some students gain the opportunity through scholarships and exchange programs with American universities. Whereas some students studying abroad simply want to try a new experience and get to know a new place and new people, others take more specific educational goals into account. American universities are seen as a site for international students to advance their English skills, to enroll in programs that fit their interests, and to add educational experience that will make them stand out in the job market.

Once students arrive on campus, they are immersed in an unfamiliar environment. Differences in university life are perceived and challenges arise. However, the students who arrive on a nonimmigrant visa go through international orientation first, which allows them to meet other international students who are facing the same uncertainties. This process gives them a level of comfort. Uncertainty arises again when international students must navigate the university system to choose classes, communicate with professors, and familiarize themselves with the formality of American higher education, something that most international students did not have to do in their countries of origin. As they adapt, international students depend almost completely on the guidance of advisors who have more knowledge about major requirements and career development.

These characteristics of study abroad programs trigger many communicative processes that involve identity. New environments bring about new discursive resources which, to reiterate Kuhn (2006), are messages that guide interpretation and mold action. Having followed certain social and cultural norms for communication in their home countries, international students need to unlearn those at times to make space for new norms. Students often feel the need to change certain habits to be able to keep up with their new lives, be it doing homework every day or paying bills. Several students also claim to have developed a work ethic that fits academic expectations of American universities. Changing certain habits may be conscious at first, but adopting American cultural and communication norms feels more natural as students become socialized. By interacting more often with people who were once perceived as being so different, international students start to understand the cultural premises that shape such communication behaviors and become more positive, tolerant, and patient in interactions with individuals from a different culture or standpoint. Some students also became more aware of racism and discrimination. On the other hand, students are also made aware of their limitations as international students if they did not feel limited at the beginning. Visa requirements really limit what they can do, and the job market is not open to them.

The reasons for studying abroad, the process of discovering cultural differences, and the challenges international students face are characteristics of a new environment that international students' identities because they establish the need to form, repair, maintain, strengthen or revise (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) identity narratives. International students seek to construct a coherent narrative that starts with the reasons for studying abroad, but their identity narratives need revision when cultural differences and challenges emerge. After some time studying

abroad, international students perceive themselves as more confident, more independent, and more aware of themselves and others.

Communicating Memorable Messages

Memorable messages that guide international students constitute discursive resources that have a significant impact on both their experiences abroad as well as their identities. Messages received by international students become memorable ones when they are geared towards their surroundings and themselves.

Most memorable messages reported in interviews were communicated when international students are struggling or feeling uncertainty. More specifically, international students encounter problems that exist because of their status as foreigners. Nazione et al. (2013) document challenges college students face on a regular basis, such as failing a class, changing one's major, and getting a job. Although international students experience those as well, they seem secondary when compared to other issues such as the ones pointed out by Chang and Kanno (2010), Sheridan (2011), and Harrison and Peacock (2010), who note that international students experience issues understanding scientific jargon, understanding assignments and participating in group work in the classroom. As reported here, language is a barrier that prevents students from communicating in the same way as local students. In addition, cultural differences in the university system can also affect performance, and subtler cultural differences also make their social lives more difficult. Several students notice that their nationality is the most prominent component of their identities when they meet people, which makes them feel like a cultural stereotype as opposed to an individual who can talk about many other aspects of whom they are.

Memorable messages become so when international students are struggling with issues similar to those noted above. Not knowing how well they are doing in classes or struggling to

socialize into the new environment makes them more receptive towards messages that provide some guidance. However, some memorable messages are grasped during big positive moments, like the defense of a thesis or delivery of an award.

The messages, like researchers suggest (Holladay, 2002; Nazione et al., 2011; Stohl, 1986), typically emanate from people who perceived as older and wiser. Messages came from international student advisors, academic and thesis advisors, professionals like professors, university staff, and counselors, and older family members like parents and siblings. However, some messages are also received from peers and friends who are going through or have been through similar experiences that international students are struggling with.

In terms of content, memorable messages received by international students teach them something that helps them navigate their experiences abroad. Memorable messages help students identify and deal with their limitations, but also encourage them to take opportunities and chances. In a similar way, Barge and Schlueter (2004) reported memorable messages that prescribed rules that limited organization members, like “[do] not call in sick before major holidays,” and they also reported highly motivational memorable messages such as “don’t be afraid to speak up” (p. 243). When students are uncertain about their performance, they rely on memorable messages to determine if they are following the right path to their academic success, similar in the volunteers in Steimel’s (2013) study who reported memorable messages that praised their competence. Finally, memorable messages often arise through observation. Memorable messages can be perceived in the actions of others when people around international students serve as role models for them. International students observed others’ behaviors and assessed them as good behaviors in a reflexive process that helped them identify who they wanted to be.

The content and context of memorable messages are important for understanding the impact such messages have on identity. Memorable messages reported here were enacted in situations where international students were prone to receive guidance to make sense of themselves and their environment.

Memorable Messages and Identity Work

Making sense of others' behaviors to set goals for themselves shows the impact memorable messages may have on international students' identities. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) note that "people being engaged" (p. 1165) is crucial in constructing distinctiveness and coherence. As such, identity work here implies individuals using the discursive resources available to construct their own narratives. In other words, international students interpret and reflexively analyze memorable messages they receive to make decisions about who they are and how they should act.

The fact that some students could not identify memorable messages that related to their experience abroad indicates that how these messages are interpreted is important. Although international students receive advice from different people at different times, some do not perceive such messages as ones that have a big influence on the course of their lives. Consequently, these messages do not have an impact on their identity.

When students did perceive memorable messages, they made sense of them by relying on their own cultural background and recalling their goals. Although the senders of memorable messages may have one intention in mind, recipients can go on a different direction than suggested as an impact of a memorable message. The messages received by Annisa and Celine are good examples of how that may happen. The comment that, "not all students in your major graduate in four years," can be interpreted as a message that was meant to both soothe and calm

the recipient, whereas “do the best you can” can be interpreted as a message that encourages the recipient to move forward. Annisa interpreted the message she received as a wake-up call for her to work harder, whereas Celine interpreted her memorable message as a reassurance that she did not need to overwhelm herself with work. These differences in interpretation are a good reminder that encoding and decoding messages are culturally influenced processes (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012), which means that ultimately culture influences the identity work that stems from memorable messages.

Many messages reported here were nonverbal, suggesting that international students analyze behaviors and *allow* themselves to be influenced by their environment, as senders do not always intend to influence international students by acting a certain way. When they receive good treatment and help in moments of struggle, international students believe that they will be someone who provides the same kind of treatment and help to others. When they hear about others’ love for a place, they want to love the place as well because it sounds like a good experience. When they see others fail, like Omar, they work harder. When others act humane and care about them, they realize they do not need to seek perfection. International students are aware of how positively or negatively they feel about others’ actions and personas, which influences what they want to be or do. Moreover, being in a different country and experiencing a new culture allows for a wider variety of actions and personas to be observed, inherently increasing the amount of choices available to set standards for their identities.

The context and character of such nonverbal memorable messages suggest individuals have agency in constructing their identities. International students thought about how people showed they cared and how these people helped in addition to verbal messages, and confirmed the nonverbal messages were memorable when they were given Knapp et al.’s (1981) definition.

Iverson, McPhee and Spaulding (2017) highlight that agency involves reflexively monitoring one's own and others' actions and having the ability to act otherwise. International students' engagement in identity work comprises those two characteristics.

Memorable Messages and Identity Regulation

Identity work is not the only identity-related communicative process triggered by memorable messages. At times, international students are not reflexively monitoring themselves and others and are not making choices on their own. In those cases, standards for whom they should be and how they should act are directly reinforced upon them. While Alvesson and Willmott (2002) view identity regulation as a form of organizational control, for international students this process does not merely influence their identities as students in an institution.

For instance, while many students received compliments and suggestions that shaped the way they do school work, some students received messages that reinforced how they should behave socially. Identity regulation happens in interactions where compliments make international students aware that they are meeting the standards or where advice encourages students to act otherwise when standards are not being met. As Alvesson and Willmott (2002) describe, "explicit reference is made to characteristics that have some validity across time and space" (p. 629). Knowing that their identities were seen as positive by others got international students to be more conscious and intentional about who they were as to not contradict others' perceptions and expectations of them. In other words, international students feel good about compliments and follow advice from people they think have the authority to determine what good behaviors are.

In other instances, students' limitations as internationals were pointed out to them. Some international students have optimistic views of themselves and expectations for the experience

abroad, such as hoping that their English skills will be improved right away, that they will get a job, or that they will make American friends easily. Finding out that they could not do such things had a calming and/or motivational effect, since understanding specific limitations was important to provide necessary information for overcoming limitations and/or accepting limitations that cannot be overcome. One limitation is based on the idea that international students do not have the cultural knowledge to develop cross-cultural competence. Being taught how culture influences American behaviors made some international students more tolerant of cultural differences. Learning about American ways of thinking was a memorable message for one of the interviewees in this study. She was more directly influenced to understand as opposed to reflexively monitoring behaviors to construct her narrative and make decisions about how to act.

Once again, the context in which these memorable messages are enacted makes a difference in how they are decoded. When international students feel helpless, they seek help and are willing to absorb and embrace almost any message that gives them hope. Students are persuaded to act accordingly by visualizing and eventually experiencing the good outcomes of fitting in the molds. In these cases, students “let themselves” be regulated because of what society expects of them, but also because seeking the standards fits their needs. When international students experience positive outcomes like receiving a good grade or making friends, they recognize the messages as memorable and take the standards upon themselves.

Implications

The answers to the research questions summarized above provide implications for the two theoretical frameworks used to guide this study. That, along with methodological

observations and a practical application of the findings are discussed. Finally, limitations of the findings are pointed out and directions for future research are offered.

Theoretical implications. The main conclusion from this study is that although memorable messages can be informed by Discourses, such messages can also influence identity in a more direct way. Although researchers of identity have investigated how interpersonal interactions influence identity, the messages exchanged are usually understood as representations of Discourses, indicating a focus on how societal discourses ultimately impact individuals' understanding of self (Ashcraft, 2013; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). However, memorable messages have a more direct impact that does not necessarily involve the reproduction of larger discourses. In terms of research on the impact of memorable messages, Kranstuber et al. (2012) have determined that memorable messages result in student success, but they have not explained the specific impact of memorable messages on international students' identities that leads to their academic success. The influence memorable messages have on identity extend the process that Smith, Ellis, and Yoo (Smith & Ellis, 2001; Smith, Ellis, & Yoo, 2001) describe. These scholars argue that memorable messages provide references for individuals to assess their own behaviors. Such self-assessment of behaviors triggered by memorable messages is comparable to the process of identity work, in which individuals are agents and constructors of their identity narratives. In contrast, the assessment of behaviors by others communicated through memorable messages is part of identity regulation, which entails influence of the context on individual identity.

However, the ways in which memorable messages are encoded and decoded are influenced by culture, or at least the recipient's state of mind. Previous literature on memorable messages has not looked at memorable messages in cross-cultural contexts. A message like

“champions are built in the off season” (Kassing & Pappas, 2007) may be motivational for American culture, but may overwhelm an international student, as it is ubiquitous and difficult to interpret. Recipients “translate” messages such as this to make them fit their respective standpoint. In her study, Ha (2009) concludes that international students’ identities are produced and reproduced in complex, dynamic and sophisticated ways, around their negotiations of available options and awareness of possibilities, and their proactive creation of new self-constructions that [are] relevant and meaningful to their sense of self (p. 212).

In other words, the complex position of international students, which involves immersion into new cultures and discourses, adds complexity to how memorable messages are received and perceived.

The circumstances in which international students receive memorable messages partially supports previous research. The people who enact memorable messages are as described by Holladay (2002), Nazione et al. (2011) and Stohl (1986) as being older and having higher status than that of the recipients. Although senders were not necessarily older, all of them were perceived by students as having higher status. This status does not necessarily refer to hierarchy or position in an organization. Having a higher status means that senders have credibility to enact and be persuasive with a memorable message, like someone who has been to a city describing how much fun it is.

Although most memorable messages in this study were enacted in informal private settings some of them were given in more formal and public, settings. When trying to figure out where she had heard her memorable message, a participant suggested that what matters really is the recipient’s state of mind, whether that is in a good or bad moment, or a private or public

setting: “if you're listening, it's a message that's given here at the university, it's given from the teachers, from all of the lecturers to the general student body. They're always like, ‘ask.’”

Although the message had been given many times, her new receptiveness made the message memorable. This is different from prior research (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Cranmer & Myers, 2017; Holladay, 2002; Stohl, 1986), where scholars argue that memorable messages often happen in private, informal events. While those scholars looked at memorable messages in the context of socialization in organizations or interpersonal relationships, orientation for international students and other formal events during their experience abroad are carefully designed to help them cope with uncertainty. Although most memorable messages were still communicated in private settings, the messages received in public settings indicate that international students are listening attentively to grasp hints or advice that can be helpful to them.

In other instances, it is the memorable message that changes the characteristics of the individual. Memorable messages trigger both identity work and identity regulation. If identity work is understood as a process in which individuals are the authors of their identity narratives, in identity regulation individuals are editors of a narrative that has already been constructed for them. However, neither process occurs without the other. Although individuals can use memorable messages as discursive resources that can help them achieve goals they had set for themselves, such goals like getting a college degree are influenced by larger societal Discourses. In the case of identity regulation, although individuals can follow what memorable messages tell them in a strict sense, it only has a permanent impact on their identity if the outcomes of changing behaviors are positive.

Another implication of this study for understanding identity is that international students used comparisons to talk about their identities. Although this comparison may have been

influenced by how the questions were posed (e.g., how did that change how you see yourself?), students talked about themselves as individuals with a core identity that keeps evolving as opposed to one with multiple identities. When talking about changes in their perceptions, students used comparatives like more independent and more confident to describe their “new selves,” as opposed to suggesting they were someone completely different. They talk about identity as something fluid that changes over time, as opposed to having several facets like Tracy and Trethewey (2005) suggest.

Overall, using identity as a lens for understanding memorable messages was helpful for determining how and why the impact of memorable messages is received. On the flip side, using memorable messages for identity helped show how identity work and identity regulation work on a more interpersonal level.

Methodological observations. The methods used in this study were reflexively analyzed throughout the research process, allowing for methodological implications to be drawn. Paying close attention to the language used highlighted assumptions made regarding the communicative phenomena being studied. For instance, most students were still experiencing the study abroad. Participants spoke of “will remember for a long time” and “will have an influence on the course of my life” when referring to memorable messages. what constitutes “a course of one’s life” and “extremely long periods of time” has not been clearly defined by this study or previous literature (Knapp et al., 1981; Stohl, 1986). As such, memorable messages described by participants may not have such an impact in their lives after school. Although participants’ interpretation of the definition of memorable message can be relied on, it is important to note that such an interpretation can vary from one participant to another.

Interpretations also vary from one researcher to another, as different theoretical assumptions and descriptive frameworks are used. The themes that emerged from the data were broader than what has been reported in previous literature. This characteristic of the findings reported here reflects the emphasis that was placed on the impact of memorable messages as opposed to simply identifying what memorable messages international students receive. Identifying the messages, however, was still an important step of the research process to provide context for the impact of memorable messages on international students' identities.

Unexpected outcomes of research also contribute to methodological implications. The initial focus of this research was on memorable messages and identity in the context of international student advising, but participant answers have shown that memorable messages are communicated in a variety of settings, and a close relationship between sender and recipient is not as relevant as expected. Given the initial focus, the conversation about memorable messages in interviews started with a focus on the relationship between international students and advisors, which may have guided answers in that direction. When asking about memorable messages, the messages themselves should be the starting point, followed by a detailed account of the context and impact of memorable messages.

The language used to describe the results also mattered. When discussing the fact that participants interact mostly with other international students, for instance, a researcher can either choose to describe the communicative process as "resisting the local norms" or "seeking a comfortable environment." The same applies to the language used to describe the impact of identity regulation. Words like "motivated" were used in this study as opposed to "pushed" or "forced." Although students are able to resist and social norms can be imposed, participants have expressed the desire to fit in and the positive outcomes of "being regulated." It is imperative to

be critical of communicative phenomena being studied, taking context into account and exposing multiple facets of the same phenomenon.

Practical applications. Advisors who work in multicultural settings can benefit from learning how memorable messages influence their advisees. Such messages need to be culturally appropriate, highlighting the importance of intercultural competence for these professionals. The advisor-advisee relationship usually revolves around academic goals. Being intentional about sending memorable messages and aware of how they can be interpreted can make communication between advisors and advisees produce better results.

The findings reported here also reinforce the importance of promoting intercultural communication between international students, host students, and university staff. The positive outcomes that international students experience stemmed mostly from intercultural interactions. Host students and university staff, as well as exchange students who only interact with other internationals, can develop cultural competence as well if interactions between groups are encouraged.

In a broader sense, university staff are now equipped with a more holistic view of an international student's experiences detailed in this study. The reasons for studying abroad that students listed reveal that the academic programs are important, but several other aspects of a study abroad experience are factored in their final decision to study overseas. International recruiters can benefit from also factoring those into their advertising materials to promote a university's programs. In addition, international student offices can ideally expand their services to train other advisors and faculty on the cultural differences and other challenges that international students might experience. Although ultimately international students learn a lot

from the struggles they experience, university faculty and staff can make the learning process smoother.

Limitations of findings. Although this study has furthered knowledge about memorable messages and their role in identity construction, it is not without limitations. For instance, my role as a full participant both enabled and constrained my interpretations. From participant selection to the coding process, my standpoint was also a lens that allowed me to see some things from the data but may also blurred others. Having worked at an international student office and being an international student gave me the background that I needed to make sense of participants' experiences and place them in a wider context.

A second limitation lies on the fact that all interviewees studied at the same university. Although the group of participants was varied in terms of age, place of origin, and level of study, being at the same university may have played a role in how similar their experiences were.

Directions for future research. To expand knowledge or further support the findings from this study, several measures can be taken. Being an international student myself, I have coded the data from an international perspective. However, since the students interviewed were studying in the U.S., an American perspective can be valuable as a different research lens. Similarly, it would be interesting to analyze whether these findings also apply for American students who go abroad for college.

Although I collected demographic data, the limited number of participants did not allow for analysis of differences in gender, nationality, type of program, and even relationship status that could impact how students perceive their experience abroad. Some of these differences came up when comparing graduate with undergraduate students because their challenges are different.

For instance, undergraduate students struggle with choosing classes whereas graduate students struggle with their research.

Moreover, this study was focused on the processes of identity work and identity regulation. Research would benefit from investigating memorable messages with other identity constructs and processes, like social identity and identity tensions, among others. The study abroad setting, as stated earlier, is one that triggers identity work, likely making it favorable for studying other identity processes.

When it comes to memorable messages, scholars have not given enough attention to nonverbal memorable messages. For international students, the way someone acts or treats them, or even a relationship, can be a memorable message. Although recipients can translate actions into words, the nonverbal character of memorable messages is promising in terms of advancing literature, given its impact on identity. Further research in memorable messages may benefit from looking back basic communication models to verify encoding and decoding of memorable messages cross-culturally.

Summary

Identity is “the conception of the self *reflexively* and *discursively* understood by the self” (Kuhn, 2006, p. 1340, emphasis added). The qualitative analysis reported here relied on participants’ accounts on how they understood themselves. Interviewees had a chance to reflect on their identities when they were asked questions about their experience abroad. Discourse was the means to both develop and express understanding of their identities. Specifically, memorable messages international students received was perceived to have a major influence on identity. Such influence is developed when the processes of identity work and identity regulation provoke shifts in students’ identities.

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Appendix A – IRB Exempt Approval

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**
for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

FWA 00000078
Research & Creative Scholarship
Interdisciplinary Science Building 104
University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
Phone 406-243-6672

Date: December 13, 2017

To: Raphaela Barros Campbell, Communication Studies
Dr. Betsy Bach, Communication Studies

From: Paula A. Baker, IRB Chair and Manager 

RE: IRB #256-17: "The Relationship between Memorable Messages and Identity Construction"

Your IRB proposal cited above has been **approved** under the **Exempt** category of review by the Institutional Review Board in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46, section 101. The specific paragraph which applies to your research is:

X (b)(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Under the Federal exempt category of review, obtaining written consent is **not** required but is optional. If you do use the written form, please use the date-stamped copy sent with this approval notice as a master from which to make copies.

University of Montana IRB policy does not require you to file an annual Continuation Report for exempt studies as there is no expiration date on the approval. However, you are required to notify the IRB of the following:

Amendments: Any changes to the originally-approved protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB **before** being made (unless extremely minor). Requests must be submitted using [Form RA-110](#).

Unanticipated or Adverse Events: You are required to timely notify the IRB if any unanticipated or adverse events occur during the study, if you experience an increased risk to the participants, or if you have participants withdraw from the study or register complaints about the study. Use [Form RA-111](#).

Please contact the IRB office with any questions at (406) 243-6672 or email irb@umontana.edu.

Form IRB-108
(Rev. 10/16)

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA-MISSOULA
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
APPLICATION FOR IRB REVIEW

IRB Protocol No.:

256-17

At the University of Montana (UM), the Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the institutional review body responsible for oversight of all research activities involving human subjects as outlined in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Human Research Protection and the National Institutes of Health, Inclusion of Children Policy Implementation.

Instructions: A separate application must be submitted for each project. IRB proposals are approved for no longer than one year and must be continued annually (unless Exempt). Faculty and students may email the completed form as a Word document to IRB@umontana.edu, or submit a hardcopy (no staples) to the IRB office in the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building, room 104. Student applications must be accompanied by email authorization by the supervising faculty member or a signed hard copy. All fields must be completed. If an item does not apply to this project, write in: N/A. Questions? Call the IRB office at 243-6672.

1. Administrative Information

Project Title: The relationship between memorable messages and identity construction	UM Position: Graduate Student and TA
Principal Investigator: Raphaela Barros Campbell	Office location: LA 339
Department: Communication Studies	Cell Phone: (865) 724-5327
Work Phone: (406) 243-6604	

2. Human Subjects Protection Training (All researchers, including faculty supervisors for student projects, must have completed a self-study course on protection of human research subjects within the last three years and be able to supply the "Certificate of Completion" upon request. If you need to add more for more people, use the Additional Researchers Addendum.)

All Research Team Members (list yourself first)	PI	CO-PI	Faculty Supervisor	Research Assistant	DATE COMPLETED IRB-approved Course mm/dd/yyyy
Name: Raphaela Barros Campbell Email: raphaela.barroscampbell@umontana.edu	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9/25/2016 ✓
Name: Betsy Wackernagel Bach Email: betsy.bach@mso.umt.edu	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	08/22/2016 ✓
Name: _____ Email: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Name: _____ Email: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

3. Project Funding (If federally funded, you must submit a copy of the abstract or Statement of Work.)

Is grant application currently under review at a grant funding agency? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (if yes, cite sponsor on ICF if applicable) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Has grant proposal received approval and funding? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (if yes, cite sponsor on ICF if applicable) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Agency: _____ Grant No: _____ e-Prop #: _____	Start Date: _____ End Date: _____ PI on grant: _____

For UM-IRB Use Only

IRB Determination:

- ☒ Not Human Subjects Research
☒ Approved by Exempt Review, Category # 2 w/ICF (see memo)
☐ Approved by Expedited Review, Category # _____ (see Note to PI)
☐ Full IRB Determination
☐ Approved (see Note to PI)
☐ Conditional Approval (see memo) - IRB Chair Signature/Date: _____
☐ Conditions Met (see Note to PI)
☐ Resubmit Proposal (see memo)
☐ Disapproved (see memo)

Note to PI: Non-exempt studies are approved for one year only. Use any attached IRB-approved forms (signed/dated) as "masters" when preparing copies. If continuing beyond the expiration date, a continuation report must be submitted. Notify the IRB if any significant changes or unanticipated events occur. When the study is completed, a closure report must be submitted. Failure to follow these directions constitutes non-compliance with UM policy.

Risk Level: Minimal

Final Approval by IRB Chair/Manager:

Date: 12/13/2017 Expires: N/A

Appendix B – Informed Consent Form

SUBJECT INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: The relationship between memorable messages and identity construction

Investigators:

Raphaela Barros Campbell, Graduate Student, Department of Communication Studies,
University of Montana, Missoula, MT, (865) 724-5327, raphaela.barroscampbell@umontana.edu

Betsy Wackernagel Bach (faculty supervisor), PhD, Department of Communication Studies,
University of Montana, Missoula, MT, (406) 396-0123, betsy.bach@mso.umt.edu

Inclusion Criteria:

- To participate in this study, you must be an international student who has been abroad for more than one semester.
- You must be 18 years old or older.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to learn how international student advising impacts students' experiences abroad. The results will expand knowledge on the relationships between messages you receive and your identity as an international student.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to participate in interview conducted by the researcher about your experience as an international student. The length of each interview will be accommodated to fit your time slots, and they are expected to last about one hour.

* Your initials _____ indicate your permission to audio record the interview.

* Audio recordings will be destroyed following transcription, and no identifying information will be included in the transcription.

Risks/Discomforts:

There might be mild discomfort in recalling and talking about personal stories related to your college experience.

Benefits:

There is no promise that you will receive any benefit from taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:

Your records will be kept confidential and will not be released without your consent except as required by law. Interview notes and audio files will only be accessed by the researcher and faculty supervisor listed. Audio files will be kept in a password protected computer and deleted after they are transcribed. If the results of this study are published in a scientific journal or presented at a scientific conference, your name will not be used.

The University of Montana IRB	
Expiration Date	None
Date Approved	12-13-2017
Chair/Admin	<i>[Signature]</i>

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:

Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in or you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are normally entitled. If you decide to withdraw, please inform the Principal Investigator at raphaela.barroscampbell@umontana.edu.

Questions:

If you have any questions about the research now or during the study, please contact: Raphaela Barros Campbell, (865) 724-5327

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the UM Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (406) 243-6672.

Statement of Your Consent:

I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed Name of Subject

Subject's Signature

Date

The University of Montana IRB
Expiration Date <u>None</u>
Date Approved <u>12-13-2014</u>
Chair/Admin <u>[Signature]</u>

Appendix C – Interview Guide

Introduction

Hello! Thank you for meeting me. I am interviewing international students because I want to know more about international students' experiences and international student advising. I plan on spending one hour interviewing you today. I have this informed consent form for you to read and ask me any questions you have about my research. If you agree to participate, sign the consent form, complete this questionnaire and we will start the interview. (Give them some time to read and sign) I will record the interview on these devices. First, I will ask you general questions that focus on describing you as a participant. Then I will ask you questions about your experience studying abroad and meeting an advisor.

Here's the consent form.

Broad Identity Questions

1. How did you decide to study abroad?
2. Describe your experience as an international student so far.
3. What do you need to do to succeed in college in your country?
4. What do you need to do to succeed in college in the U.S.?
5. What are the challenges of being an international student?
6. How has your experience abroad changed how you see yourself?

International Student Advising

1. For what reasons do you visit your advisor? How often do you see an international student advisor?
2. What's a typical conversation with your advisor like?
3. How would you describe your relationship with your advisor?
4. What have advisors said that really stuck with you?
5. Here's a definition of a memorable message ("may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives"). Do you think the messages you mentioned fit this definition?
6. Give examples of other memorable messages your advisors have given you.
7. What was the situation when you received this message? (repeat this question for each message)
8. In what situations have you recalled this message? (repeat this question for each message)
9. How did this message impact or influence you? (repeat this question for each message)
10. How did this message change the way you see yourself? (repeat this question for each message)

Appendix D – Questionnaire

Age (in years): _____ Country of origin: _____
Gender: _____ How long have you been in the U.S? _____
Type of student: ☐ Degree seeking undergraduate student
☐ Nondegree seeking undergraduate student
☐ Graduate student
Religion (if none, write N/A): _____

Appendix E – Recruitment Statement

Title: The relationship between memorable messages and identity construction

I am a graduate student at the Communication Studies Department at the University of Montana and intern at the International Students and Scholars office, and I would like to conduct a study on how messages received by international students impact their experience abroad.

To participate in this study, you must be an international student who has been abroad for more than one semester. I am asking you to volunteer to participate in an interview about your experience abroad and with your advisors.

To participate in this study, you must be an international student who has been abroad for more than one semester. Also, you must be 18 years of age or older to participate. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study at any time. I cannot guarantee any benefits from participating in this research, but risks are minimal. I will keep all interview and observation records confidential.

Appendix F – Codebook Sample

"You can't do everything.""Take your chances.""You can learn from me.""You're doing okay."New selvesSetting new standards of selfMotivated selvesMotivated positiveness

Pseudonym	MM1	Context	Recall	Impact	ID
Laura	<u>Do as much as you are can/finding time to volunteer</u>	Casual conversation before trip, uncertain then relieved/Casual conversation	Not feel like doing something/I have to many things to do	I go and do it/you're never too busy	<u>You can do it/complain too much</u>
Jane	<u>Different attitude</u>			I'm not in China	
Sara	<u>They're there for me</u>	unconditionally, different than Japan	Thanksgiving	Not intimidated She had a blast, I should give my all/Happier	<u>little sister, not reliable</u>
Ava	<u>Her love for the city, Take any opportunity</u>	Private, casual conversation, uncertainty	it's true, it's beautiful/Yellowstone		<u>More outgoing/More enduring</u>
Mina	<u>Americans think this way</u>		Visiting in Miami		<u>Not wrong, different, way of thinking is spread out</u>
Celine	<u>You are welcoming/you work hard/do the best you can</u>	Defense/working hard		More conscious, standard, find where limit is	
Lucas	<u>Being human/be humble</u>	Parking tickets his first week/Before conference	Copy language when arguing/Taking my skills for granted/Talking to other researchers	Change the way he argues	<u>reassured what I needed to be = not a cold machine/when I see it, I can change it</u>